TOM BURNABY

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A Warm Reception. (See page 46.)

TOM BURNABY

A STORY OF UGANDA AND THE GREAT CONGO FOREST

BY

HERBERT STRANG

NEW EDITION

What good gift have my brothers, but it came
From search and strife and loving sacrifice?
SIR EDWIN ARNOLD

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MY DEAR JACK,

Your birthday has come round again--and here, with every good wish, is another book for your shelf. No mailed knights this time; our story is of the present day. Yet you shall find paynim hordes as many and as fierce as you please; yes, and chivalry

itself, or I am much mistaken,--although we may not spell it with a capital C. For it is a theory of mine--"Old Uncle and his theories!" I hear you say!--that the spirit of chivalry is as much alive to-day as ever, and finds as free a scope. And if chivalry is, as I take it to be, the championing of the weak and the oppressed, no region of the world offers a wider field than Central Africa, where there is still ample work for the countrymen of Livingstone and Gordon. Some day, perhaps, you may yourself visit that land, and come back with as deep a sense of its glamour and pathos as the rest of us. Meanwhile, since even at Harrow the sky is not always clear, why not on some rainy afternoon pack up your traps and transport yourself in imagination to Uganda with Tom Burnaby? If you return with a certain stock of information about the land and its people--well, your old uncle will be all the better pleased. Not, of course, that this trip should be a reason for neglecting your football--or other duties!

Your affectionate uncle, *HERBERT STRANG.*

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A belt of matted woodland. At the edge, three Belgian officers, in light uniform and white topee, lying prone, and peering cautiously out through glasses. Before them, a wide clearing, with a mud-walled town in the midst, and huge forest-trees beyond. Behind, a few score stalwart Bangala, strewn panting on the ground. Over all, the swarming sunlit haze of tropical Africa.

The gates stand open; peace reigns in Kabambari. But what is peace in Kabambari? Some hundreds of negro slaves are tilling sorghum in the cultivated tract outside the stockaded walls. Their chains clank as they move heavily down the field, dogged by an Arab overseer armed with rifle, scimitar, and whip. The pitiless sun, scorching their bent backs, blackens the scars left by the more pitiless scourge.

In the copse there is a whispered word of command; the negro soldiers spring silently to their feet, line up as best the broken ground permits, and then, at the heels of their white officers, charge out into the sunlight. No yell nor cheer, as they dash towards the open gate; the overseer, ere he can give the alarm, is bayoneted while his finger is on the trigger; the slaves, listless, apathetic, have scarcely time to realize their taskmaster's doom before the thin line has swept past them and through the gates. Then there is a sudden sharp crackle of musketry; cries of startled fear and savage triumph; and by ones and twos and threes, turbaned figures pour out of the far side of the town, a scanty remnant of the Arab garrison. One by one they drop as they cross the open; only a few gain the shelter of the forest. The heirs of Tippu Tib are broken and dispersed. The struggle has been long, the issue doubtful; but now, after years of stern fighting, the great Arab empire, founded upon murder, rapine, and slavery, is scattered to the winds. One thing only is wanting to make this last victory complete. Rumaliza, the Arab commander, Tippu Tib's ablest lieutenant, has escaped the net. Whether to live and build anew the dread fabric raised by his late chief; or whether to die in the gloomy depths of the Great Forest by starvation or disease, or by the poisoned

arrow of the Bambute--who can say?

CHAPTER I

Fitting Out an Expedition

The Major--A New Friend--By Rail to Uganda--Dr. O'Brien Introduces Himself--The Major Orders a Retreat--Left Behind

A suit of boating flannels and a straw hat are no doubt a convenient, cool, and comfortable outfit for a July day on the Thames, but they fail miserably to meet the case on an average hot morning in Central Africa. So Tom Burnaby found as he walked slowly through Kisumu, stopping every now and again to mop his face and wish he were well out of it. If his dress had not betrayed him, his undisguised interest in the scene would in itself have bespoken the "griffin" to the most casual observer. The few Europeans whom he met eyed him with looks half of amusement, half of concern. One advanced as if to address him, then repented of the impulse and passed on.

Suddenly his attention was arrested by a noise ahead, gradually increasing in intensity as he approached. "The queerest noise you ever heard in your life," he wrote in a letter to a chum at home. "Imagine some score of huge ginger-beer bottles turned topsy-turvy and the fizz gurgling out, with a glug, glug, glug, and a sort of gigantic fat chuckle at the end,--then more glugging and chuckling, and chuckling and glugging. I was wondering what it meant, when suddenly I came to a huge shed, and then I saw the cause of all the row. About a hundred natives, as black as your hat, their skins shining like polished bronze, were working away at baggage and packages of all sorts, rolling up canvas, packing boxes and bales, tugging at ropes, and all the time jabbering and cackling and laughing and glug-glugging like a cageful of monkeys.

"I stood still and watched them for a minute, and then there was a sudden lull in the uproar, and I heard my old uncle's voice for the first time. There he was, the dear old chap, perched on a pile of ammunition-boxes, and the language he was using was evidently so warm that it was a wonder the whole show didn't blow up. I could only make out a word here and there, most of it was double Dutch to me; but whatever it was, it made those poor black fellows bustle for all they were worth. Then in the middle of his address the old boy suddenly caught sight

of my unlucky self. You should have seen the expression on his face! He stopped as if a live shell had pitched into the shed; and--well, what happened then must keep till our next meeting. I could never do justice to the interview in a letter."

To say that Major John Burnaby was surprised at the sudden appearance of his nephew in Kisumu only feebly expresses his state of mind. After a few seconds of speechlessness, his feelings found vent in the deliberate exclamation:

"Well--I'm--hanged!"

Tom stood in front of him, looking very warm. There was another embarrassing silence.

"What do you mean by this?" were the major's next words.

"I really couldn't help it, Uncle Jack."

"Couldn't help it!" gasped the major.

"Oh well, you know what I mean! I saw in the papers that a column was going up to catch the beggars who killed Captain Boyes, and that you had got the job. 'Uncle Jack,' I thought, 'has got his chance at last, and I'm going to be there.' And here I am!"

"I see you are! And you mean to say you have left your work, thrown it all up, ruined your career, to come on a wild-goose chase like this? You'll go home by the next boat, sir."

"Don't say that, Uncle. I know it's sudden, but you see there was no time to lose. I couldn't write; I should never have got your answer in time; and you surely couldn't expect me to stop in a grimy engineering shop on the Clyde when my only uncle had got his chance at last! I must see it through with you, Uncle Jack."

"Must! must!" repeated the major. "Tom, I'm surprised at you--and annoyed, sir--seriously annoyed at your folly. The absurdity of it all! You can't join the expedition. It's against the regulations, for one thing; this is a soldier's job, and civilians would only be in the way. Besides, you're not seasoned; the climate would bowl you over in no time, and you're too young to peg out comfortably. What's more, you'd be no earthly use. Oh! I can't argue it with you," pursued the major, as Tom was about to protest; "you're demoralizing my men. Cut off to my bungalow, and keep out of mischief till I have done with them. Then I shall have something to say to you."

Tom looked pleadingly for an instant into his uncle's face, but finding no promise of relenting there, he turned slowly on his heel and walked away.

"So much for that! I was half afraid I'd catch it," he said to himself. "My word, isn't it hot!"

Tom was only eighteen, but he had already had disappointments enough, he

thought, to last him a lifetime. Ever since he could remember, he had set his heart on being a soldier like his uncle Jack; but the sudden death of his father, a quiet country parson, had left him with only a few hundreds for his whole capital, and he had perforce to give up all ideas of going to Sandhurst. At this critical moment an opening offered itself in the works of an engineering firm on the Clyde, the head of which was an old school chum of his uncle's. It was Hobson's choice. He went to Glasgow, and there for a few months felt utterly forlorn and miserable. Then he pulled himself together, and began to take an interest even in the grimy work of the fitting-shop. He worked well, went through various departments, and was gaining experience in the draughtsman's office when he read one day in the paper that his uncle was appointed to the command of a punitive expedition in the Uganda Protectorate. The news revived his old yearnings; after one restless night he drew out enough to pay his passage and buy an outfit, and booked himself on the first P. and O. steamer for Suez.

Among his fellow-passengers the only one with whom he had much to do was a plump German trader, who joined at Gibraltar from a Hamburg liner. He amused Tom with his outbursts of patriotic fervour, alternating with periods of devotion to the interests of his firm. At one moment he was soaring aloft with the German eagle; at the next he was quoting his best price for pig-iron. Tom found him useful to practise his German on. He had always had a turn for languages; indeed, his only distinctions at school, besides his being the best bat in the eleven and a safe man in goal, were won in German and French. Naturally, he soon scraped acquaintance also with the chief engineer, and the pleasantest hours of the voyage out were those he spent in the engine-room, where he showed an unusually intelligent interest in the details of the machinery. He changed ship at Suez, and was heartily glad when, on awaking one morning, he caught sight of the white houses of Mombasa gleaming amid the dark-green bush.

The first thing he did on landing was to enquire the whereabouts of the expedition. He learned that it was fitting out at Kisumu, six hundred miles inland, on the shore of the Victoria Nyanza, and that he could reach the terminus at Port Florence by railway in two days. There being no train till next morning, he swallowed his impatience and roamed about the town. Amid the usual signs of Arab ruin and neglect he saw evidences of a new life and activity. He could not but admire the splendid harbour, in which a couple of British cruisers were lying at anchor; he climbed up to the old dismantled Portuguese fort, and examined every nook and cranny of it; he strolled about through the narrow, twisted streets, finding much to interest him at every step--grave Arab booth-keepers, sleek and wily Persians, lank Indian coolies, and negroes of every race and size in every variety of undress.

He put up for the night at the Grand Hotel. At dinner he was faced by

an elderly gentleman with ruddy cheeks, side whiskers, and a shiny pate, who gave him a casual glance, but, with the Englishman's usual taciturnity, for some time said nothing. When, however, he had comfortably settled his soup, the old gentleman held his glass of claret to the light, looked at Tom over the rims of his spectacles, and said:

"Just out, sir?"

"Yes; I landed this morning."

"H'm! Government appointment, sir?"

"Well no, not exactly. The fact is, I've come out to see my uncle."

"H'm! Many boys do; hard up, I suppose," said the old gentleman under his breath. "Name, sir?"

"Burnaby--Tom Burnaby. My uncle is Major Burnaby of the Guides."

"Might have known it, h'm! you're as like as two tom-cats. Jack Burnaby's a fine fellow, sir; I know him. Fine country this. We made it a fine country. Ain't you proud to be an Englishman? 'Tis four hundred years or so since Vasco da Gama--heard of him, I suppose?--came ashore here on his famous voyage to India. To be exact, it was the year 1497. It was a fine place then; did a fine trade, sir. He didn't get backed up. No stamina in those Portuguese. Suffer from jumps, don't you know. Arabs got in; consequence, rack and ruin. Decay, sir; dry rot and mildew. We stepped in somewhere in the twenties, and then--stepped out again. Stupid! Now we've got our foot in, and begad we won't lift it again, or I don't know Joe Chamberlain. I know him. H'm!"

The old fellow's short snaps of sentences, and the little gasps he gave at intervals, rather tickled Tom.

"Yes," he continued, "the Sultan of Zanzibar in 1888 ceded it provisionally to the British East Africa Company. They were made definite masters of the place two years later, and also put in possession of a vast tract of country extending four hundred miles along the coast. H'm!"

At this Tom began to fear that he was in for a lecture, but he was reassured the next moment.

"Jack Burnaby's at Kisumu, six hundred miles up the line. There's a fine thing for you, now--this railway. Suppose you are going up to-morrow? We're coming on next week. Well, a word of advice, h'm! Don't go third-class. Nobody goes third-class. Blacks, you know--and lions. A lion boarded the train the other day, and swallowed two niggers in a winking. Strong-flavoured meat, h'm! Lions never touch first-class passengers--never tackled me! Well, I'll be glad to see Jack Burnaby again. He'll remember Ted Barkworth; yes, begad, and our little diversion in Tokio in 95. Now, sir, will you come and smoke a cigar with me? Don't smoke? Well, well, none the worse for it, at present, h'm! See you on the veranda, no doubt."

Mr. Barkworth went off to the smoking-room. As Tom got up, he noticed a red-covered book lying on the chair next to the one occupied by his talkative neighbour. He picked it up, intending to give it to one of the waiters, and casually turned over the leaves. The book opened rather easily at one place, and Tom, glancing at the page, saw: "The Sultan of Zanzibar in 1888 ceded it provisionally to the British East Africa Company. They were made definite masters of the place two years later, and also--" He read no farther; he had just recognized the passage which Mr. Barkworth had reeled off so glibly, and was chuckling at having discovered the source of the old man's information, when his glee was checked by a pleasant voice at his elbow saying:

"Excuse me, but have you seen a red-covered guide-book, left on one of the chairs?"

Tom straightened his face, and, turning, saw a pretty girl of some seventeen summers, looking very dainty and bewitching in her plain white frock. He closed the book, and held it out without a word.

"Oh, thank you!" said the girl. "Poor Father is always so careless."

And with a smile she flitted out of the room.

Later in the evening, when Tom strolled on to the veranda, Mr. Barkworth came up to him.

"H'm! come and let me introduce you to my daughter, sir. Lilian, Mr. Burnaby, nephew of my old friend Major Jack."

Lilian Barkworth gave Tom a friendly little nod and smile of recognition.

"My daughter, you know, Mr. Burnaby, wants to see the world--very restless, h'm! keeps her poor old father constantly on the trot. Two days in one place, then off we go: here to-day and gone to-morrow, h'm! But there's the admiral, I see--I know him; I must go and say how d'e do. Lilian, you may talk to Mr. Burnaby till nine o'clock. See you again, sir."

When he had gone over to speak to the admiral, Tom and Miss Barkworth looked at each other and smiled.

"Dear old Father! How deluded he is!" she said. "He firmly believes he scours the world for my benefit. I wouldn't undeceive him, but really, Mr. Burnaby, I would much rather live a quieter life. Now tell me, did he quote the guide-book?"

"Well, he did give me some historical information--"

"Ah! I thought so. I fancied you were smiling when you had the book in your hand. But he'll forget it all by to-morrow; he gets it up in five minutes and loses it in ten."

"Here to-day and gone to-morrow," suggested Tom, and the little quotation put them on good terms with each other, so that Tom was surprised to find how quickly the evening had flown when Miss Barkworth by and by held out her hand

and said that her time allowance had expired.

He left Mombasa next morning before the Barkworths appeared. The journey on the single line of the Uganda railway was full of interest to him, impatient as he was to arrive at his destination. The train passed through some of the most wonderful scenery to be found anywhere on the face of the globe. Here were huge boulders, poised as though by some giant's hand, and the craters of long-extinct volcanoes; there, long stretches of open country, skirted by dense forests of acacias, banana-trees, and other tropical vegetation. Gazelles, giraffes, zebras, hartebeest sported in herds over the green plains; an occasional baboon was seen squatting on a branch; and here and there, by some lake or riverside, hippopotamuses and rhinoceroses wallowed and revelled in the shallows. Amid these signs of wild life appeared at intervals the straw huts of a native village; or a shanty, roofed with corrugated iron, marked the coming of civilization and trade: and then, towering high into the sky, rose the gigantic snow-capped form of Mount Kilimanjaro. The long journey came to an end at last, and Tom found his uncle--only to meet with sore disappointment, as already related.

He was still feeling rather downhearted as he walked towards Port Florence in the sweltering heat. It was by this time mid-afternoon, and every discreet person was indulging in siesta in the shade. Tom met no one but a few natives, dressed in little but hippo teeth and bead necklaces, and he was wondering how to find his way to the major's bungalow when his ear was caught by unmistakeable cries of pain. Turning a corner he saw a young black-follow writhing in the grip of a European in light but dirty attire, who held his victim by his woolly hair, and was belabouring his bare back with a whip of rhinoceros hide.

"Hi, you there? stop that!" cried Tom.

The man looked up sharply, gave the interrupter one scowling glance; and, seeing only a stripling, laid on again.

"D'you hear? Stop that!" shouted Tom, hurrying along till he came within arm's-length of the bully. "Drop that whip, or I'll knock you down."

The man, apparently a Portuguese of the low type that Portugal sends to her colonies, stared at him, spat out a curse, and raised his whip to strike again. That instant Tom's right arm shot out straight from the shoulder, and before the cruel thong could descend again, the brute found himself lying on his back in a pool of green mud. By the time he had picked himself up the negro had slipped away, and soon put enough ground between himself and his tormentor to make pursuit hopeless. Quivering with passion the man drew a knife from his belt and glared menacingly at Tom, who stood with hot brow and clenched fists ready to repeat the blow. But the sound of the altercation had drawn a few spectators to

the spot, and, fearing the sure hand of British justice, the discomfited Portuguese furtively replaced his knife, and, with another ferocious look at Tom, slunk away.

"Fery goot, fery goot, my young friend," said a voice near Tom; "but you hafe soon forgot vun of my advice-vords."

"Oh, it's you, is it, Herr Schwab?" said Tom, turning and recognizing his fellow-passenger on the steamer.

"Yes, it is me," replied the German. "Vat hafe I said? I hafe said: Before all zings, step never in betveen ze native and ze vite man. Ze native are all bad lot, as you say. Now you hafe vun enemy, my young friend."

"Oh, that's all right! You couldn't expect me to look on and see that murderous brute ill-using the poor wretch?"

The German shrugged.

"Black is black, and business are business. Kindness all fery goot, courage equally all fery goot, but you should hafe--vat you call tact."

"Tact! Tuts! An ounce of common-sense to begin with," broke in another voice. "Where did you get that fool of a hat? Come along, come along."

Tom felt a firm hand on his sleeve, and, too much surprised to resist, he allowed himself to be dragged along by the new-comer, who did not stop till they reached the water's edge. There he stooped down and plucked a couple of large green leaves from a strange plant, and a moment later Tom found them flapping about his ears beneath his hat.

"There, now you'll do," said his captor. "The idea of coming out and practising boxing under an African sun in a three-and-sixpenny straw hat! Sure an' if I hadn't met you you would have been food for jackals in twelve hours. Thank your stars you were taken in hand by Dr. Corney O'Brien. And now, who are you?"

The little man with the keen gray eyes and pleasant mouth looked up at Tom and frowned.

"A Burnaby, by the powers! And I never knew the major had a family. Ah, but you're a Burnaby, plain enough, whatever they christened ye--Tom, Dick, or Harry!"

"Right first shot, Doctor," said Tom with a smile. "I'm Tom Burnaby, at your service. Will you be good enough to direct me to my uncle's bungalow?"

"Will I? Indeed I will. Come along."

Talking all the time, the little doctor led Tom in the direction of Port Florence. A few minutes' walking brought them to the major's bungalow, a one-story building of wood, raised a few inches from the ground, with a neatly-thatched roof overhanging a sort of veranda. Tom was soon stretching his legs luxuriously in one of his uncle's comfortable chairs, and scanning the walls hung with small-arms, hunting trophies, and a few choice engravings.

"Ah, this is nice!" he said. "Can I have a drink, Doctor?"

"To be sure. What'll you have? Your uncle's burgundy is good. I can recommend it."

"Really, a drink of water would do me best just now."

"Very well. Here, Saladin, cold water."

The major-domo, a tall muscular Musoga, appeared with a carafe of sparkling water.

"Lucky you're this side of the counthry," the doctor went on. "For ten years, d'ye know, I never wance touched water. 'Twas in Ould Calabar, where most of the dry land is swamp, and the rest mud, and the rule is, drink and die. But what are ye doing out here, my bhoy?"

Tom told his story, the doctor breaking in every now and then with sympathetic little ejaculations.

"'Tis hard luck; to be sure it is," he said, when Tom had told him of his uncle's blunt refusal to allow him to accompany the expedition. "But the major's right, you know, and I couldn't venture any attempt to persuade'm. We call'm Ould Blazes, you see."

"I couldn't ask you to, Doctor. I've come on a fool's errand, and have only myself to blame. I must just make the best of it. What is to be is to be."

"That's right, now. And sure here's the major himself."

"Pf! pf!" blew Major Burnaby, as he entered the room. "Glad that's over for the day at any rate. You've got the young scamp in hand, I see, Corney. Tom, untwizzle that ringer; I must tub before I do anything else."

Tom looked up to where his uncle was pointing, above his head, and saw the wire of an electric bell twisted round a bracket on the wall. He got up and pressed the button, and the major-domo appeared.

"Tub, Saladin," said the major. "And look here, this is my nephew; put him up a bed and do him well."

"All right, sah! all same for one," returned the negro cheerfully.

In a few moments the major could be heard splashing and gasping in the next room, and ere long he returned in mufti, looking cool and comfortable in a suit of white ducks and a silk cummerbund. He asked the doctor to stay to dinner, and Tom sat listening eagerly to his seniors' conversation, and admiring his uncle's thorough grasp of even the minutest details of the expedition.

It was to set out, he learned, in three or four days' time, some three hundred and fifty strong, from Port Florence, and was to cross the Nyanza in steam launches. The only Europeans besides the major and Dr. O'Brien were Captain Lister and a subaltern, the non-commissioned officers being trustworthy Soudanese. Their objective was the village of a petty chief, about a hundred and fifty miles west of the Nyanza, who had revolted against British authority, and in concert with the remnants of an old Arab slave-dealing gang had raided his more

peaceful neighbours. In the course of subsequent proceedings he had treacherously killed a British officer, and a punitive expedition became inevitable. The greater part of the military forces of the Protectorate were engaged in police work on the north-eastern frontier; but they were hastily recalled, and within a month, thanks to Major Burnaby's energy, the punitive column was ready to start. The stores for the expedition were collected at rail-head, and the major had been very busy day and night in getting them up from the coast, and seeing that everything possible, to the smallest detail, was done to secure the safety and success of the column.

After the doctor had gone, the major sat for some minutes silently puffing his pipe, while Tom nervously turned over the leaves of a month-old copy of the Times. At length the major laid down his pipe, cleared his throat, and began:

"Look here, Tom, few words are best. I suppose you realize by this time that you did a very foolish thing in coming out. What's more, it was a very inconsiderate thing. Here am I, with my hands full, toiling day and night to straighten things out,--and you must come and complicate matters just as I'm driving in the last peg, and without a moment's warning; in fact, making an attempt to force my hand! It was silly, it was wrong, to say nothing of the waste of time when you ought to be working at your profession, and the waste of money which you know as well as I do you can't afford. There'd be a glimmer of excuse, perhaps, if I could make any use of you, and I'd stretch a point to do so; but it's entirely out of the question. I can't find any reason, not even a pretence of one, for bringing you in. There is really nothing for you to do. So there is no help for it, and, as you can't possibly stay here, and are bound to go back, you may as well go at once. If you really and seriously think of choosing Africa for your career, there'll be plenty of time to talk about that when you've finished your training; and we can go into it when I get home."

The major relit his pipe, and hid his sympathetic features behind a cloud of smoke. After a moment Tom said quietly:

"I'm sorry, Uncle. I didn't see it from that point of view. I was an ass. I'll go home and do my best."

"That's right, my boy," said the major heartily. "It's no good crying over spilt milk. I was young myself once; we all have to buy our experience, and 'pon my word I think you're getting yours pretty cheap after all."

He rose from his chair, and put his hand kindly on Tom's shoulder. "I'm going to turn in," he added; "have to be up at dawn. Call Saladin if you want anything. Good-night!"

During the next few days Tom almost forgot his disappointment, so much was he interested in watching the final preparations. There were boxes and bales everywhere. Empty kerosene cans were shipped on the launches, to be filled

with water when the force began its land march. Boxes of ammunition, tin-lined biscuit-boxes of provisions, a tent or two for the officers, canvas bags and smaller cases for the medical stores, were carried on board on the backs of stalwart negroes, and all their friends and neighbours crowded around, gesticulating frantically in their excitement. It was all so novel that Tom had scarcely a minute to reflect on his hard luck; and, indeed, so far from sulking, he sought every opportunity of making himself useful, and was well pleased when he chanced to overhear his uncle one evening say to Dr. O'Brien:

"'Pon my word, Corney, I'm sorry we can't take the boy. I like his spirit. He's willing to turn his hand to anything, and has relieved me of quite a number of odd jobs during the past few days. But I don't see how we can possibly take him, and in any case he will be better at home."

The last day came. It was a fine Thursday in May. There was a crispness in the air that set the pulses beating faster and made life seem worth living indeed. Everything was done. The stores were well stowed on board, the fighting-men and carriers had answered the roll-call, and the major, with a final survey, had assured himself that nothing had been overlooked. The launches had been getting up steam for an hour or more, and the officers, having seen their men on board, were standing on the quay to take a farewell of the little group of Europeans assembled to wish them God-speed.

The whole population of the place seemed to have gathered to witness the start. Arabs in their long garments, turbaned Indians, and more or less naked negroes were mingled in one dense mass along the shore. Some of the natives had donned their best finery for the occasion. One old fellow appeared in a battered chimney-pot hat and a tattered shirt that reached his knees, with a red umbrella tucked under his arm. Others displayed plush jackets of vivid hue, and wore coral charms and bracelets round their necks and arms. Women with little brown babies filled the air with their babblement, and the noise was diversified now and then by the squealing grunt of camels and the whinnying of mules.

Tom was the last to grasp his uncle's hand.

"Good-bye, Uncle!" he said. "Good luck to you!"

"Good-bye, my boy! Sorry you aren't with us. But cheer up; please God, we'll have a good time together yet."

Then the gangway was removed, and, amid British cheers and African whoops, the launches puffed and snorted and glided away over the brownish waters of the great lake.

Tom heaved a sigh as he turned away.

"Well, well, that's over," said Mr. Barkworth, walking with Lilian by his side. "We haven't seen much of you, sir, since we came up on Monday. Never fear, your uncle will pull it off. I remember, now, at Calcutta, a year or two ago, he said to

me: 'Barkworth, I'm going downhill fast. Here am I at forty-six the wretchedest dog in the service, with nothing but half-pay and idleness in front of me.' 'Cheer up,' said I, 'you'll get your chance. There is a tide in the affairs of men, you know. You'll be a K.C.B. yet.' I knew it, h'm!"

"I'd give anything to have gone too," said Tom.

Lilian looked amazed and shocked.

"Why, Mr. Burnaby, you might get killed!" she said.

Tom laughed.

"I'd chance that. Besides, I might not. Anyhow, it's better to be killed striking a blow for England than to peg out with pneumonia in a four-poster, or die of a brick off a chimney."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Mr. Barkworth. "Pure fudge! Gordon said something of the same sort to me once; I knew him--a sort of forty-eleventh cousin. 'Barkworth,' he said, 'Heaven is as near the hot desert as the cool church at home.' Now I'm what they call a globe-trotter, through this restless girl of mine here, and I tell you that when my time comes I shan't rest comfortably unless I'm laid in the old churchyard at home. H'm! But this won't do. We aren't skull and crossbones yet. Come and dine with us to-night, Mr. Burnaby; seven sharp; you'll meet a padre too; one of the White Fathers, you understand. Knows every inch of the country, and speaks the language like a native--only better. Lilian stayed for a year with some friends of his in France, and we brought out a letter of introduction. A fine fellow, this White Father--no white feather about him, ha! ha! You take me, eh! Well, then, we'll see you at seven. Mind you--seven sharp!"

CHAPTER II

Mbutu

Mbutu--Hatching a Plot--The Padre--A Consultation

The sun had set, and Tom was sitting in his uncle's bungalow, ruminating. He had changed his clothes in preparation for dining with Mr. Barkworth; but there was still nearly an hour to spare, so he sat back in his chair with his hands in his pockets and stared at his toes. In a few more hours he would be jolting down to Mombasa. There was no getting over that. He pictured his uncle penetrating the forest at the head of his men; the cautious advance; the first sight of the enemy.

He heard in imagination the rattle of musketry, and the major's ringing voice giving orders and cheering the combatants. And while these stirring events were in progress, he himself was to be condemned to inactivity on a passenger steamer! Tom was hit harder than he had believed.

Sitting brooding on these things, and feeling the reaction doubly after the excitement of the past few days, he suddenly became fully conscious of a sensation that had for some time been creeping over him unawares. He felt that he was not alone, that someone was looking at him. There was no one with him in the room, he knew; no one in the bungalow even, except the grave, silent Indian servant, who was the only member of the household left behind.

"Rummy feeling this," said Tom to himself, pinching himself to make sure that he was awake. He jumped up and switched on the electric-light, and in the first flash thought he saw a black face pressed against the narrow window-panes. Instantly he ran to the door, flung it open, and returned in a moment with a woolly-pated black boy in his grasp. Gripping him firmly with one hand, he locked and bolted the door with the other, then loosed his hold and stood with arms akimbo.

"Now then, who are you? What does this mean?" he said.

The boy stuck his arms akimbo in imitation of Tom, grinned, and chortled rather than said:

"Me run away!"

"Oh indeed! Run away, have you? And where from, may I ask?"

"Me Mbutu, sah! Mbutu servant dago man; sah knock him down; me no go back--no, no; me hide; now me heah."

He chortled again with a childish air of satisfaction which made Tom smile.

"Oh! So you're the beggar I saved from the whip, are you? Well, my boy, I'm very glad to have helped you; but really I don't see what more I can do for you. Hungry, eh?"

"No, no."

"Well, then, what do you want?"

"Me and you, sah; you me fader and mudder, sah; all same for one; me stop, long stop."

"Oh, come! it's kind of you to say so, but I'm off to Mombasa to-morrow, and then home--over the big water, you understand. Don't want to adopt anyone yet, and can't afford a tiger."

The boy's face fell. Then he clasped his hands and poured out a rapid torrent of the queerest English, evidently an account of his career. Tom made out that he belonged to an ancient Bahima tribe, and was the son of a chief whose village had been raided by Arabs, all his people being killed or carried off as slaves. The boy himself, after two years of captivity, had escaped, through a series of lucky acci-

dents, to British territory, and had since been more or less of an Ishmael, picking up a precarious living in doing odd jobs about the European bungalows. His last master had treated him with a brutality that recalled his years of captivity with the Arab slavers. Tom's short way with the bully had won the boy's unbounded admiration and gratitude. He had remained in hiding until he knew that the Portuguese had taken his departure, and then had felt that he could not do better than attach himself to his benefactor.

Such was his story, told disconnectedly, the English pieced out with occasional phrases in Swahili, the *lingua franca* of Eastern and Central Africa. Through all the narrative there was a convincing note of reality. The boy pleaded to be allowed to serve Tom for the rest of his life till, as he said, the "long night" came. He would not ask for wages, he could live on anything--nothing; and he flung himself down at Tom's feet, imploring him not to drive him away.

"Poor chap!" said Tom. "Sorry for you, but what can I do? My uncle wouldn't have me, or I might have made some use of you. And there's no chance now; he's away with the expedition to Ankori."

Mbutu's eyes opened to their fullest extent.

"Sah him uncle!" he cried.

He looked puzzled and anxious, and yet seemed to hesitate.

"Well, what is it?" asked Tom.

"Sah him uncle!" repeated the boy; and then, to Tom's amazement, he rattled off a story of how, some ten days before, he had overheard a conversation between his late master and the interpreter to the expedition.

"Palaver man bad man, sah. Much bad. Talk bad things. Say black man hide; white man walk so." He took a pace or two with head erect, eyes looking straight ahead, and arms straight down his thighs. "White man no see not much; bang! soosh! white man all dead."

Everything he said was illustrated with many strange pantomimic gestures, and Tom was at first puzzled what to make of it all. Then he set himself patiently to question the boy, using the simplest words, and from his answers he put together, bit by bit, a most astonishing story. About a fortnight before, the Portuguese had come with Mbutu from the forest west of the Nyanza, accompanied by an Arab, and had taken up his quarters in a small bungalow not far from rail-head. He was in and out all day, engaged in some mysterious business which the boy had never succeeded in fathoming, while the Arab had disappeared on their arrival in Kisumu. One hot night Mbutu, feeling restless and unable to sleep, went outside the bungalow with a pipe of his master's which he intended to smoke. He was fumbling in his loin-cloth for a match, when he saw a figure slinking cautiously towards him. His movements were so stealthy and furtive that Mbutu's curiosity was at once aroused. Unfortunately for the stranger, who clearly wished to escape

observation, the moon was high, and Mbutu, concealed by a friendly post in the compound, watched him steal up to the bungalow, enter quietly, and shut the door. The boy, avoiding the patches of moonlight, crept round the veranda with the noiselessness of a cat till he came to a half-open window. A lamp was burning in the room, throwing a long beam of light into the darkness without, and in skirting this bright zone the boy tripped over an empty wooden crate from which the cook obtained his supply of firewood. The impact of Mbutu's shins against the sharp edges of the crate set the thing creaking, but the noise was drowned by the yelp of a jackal in a nullah hard by, and after a few moments of anxious suspense Mbutu breathed again. He peeped cautiously round the edge of the window. The room was empty, but as the light had not been removed Mbutu concluded that his master would soon return. This proved to be the case, for in less than a minute the Portuguese appeared, moved quickly to the window, and lifted the iron rod as though to close it. But the night was so hot that he changed his mind, comfort prevailing over caution. He left the window as it was, and simply lowered the blind. Then, turning to the door, he beckoned his visitor into the room. A thin beam of light still filtered between the bottom of the blind and the window-sill, and Mbutu's sharp eyes noticed that the sill was wide, projecting some inches from the wall. He saw that under this he could lie without fear of detection, and probably hear all that passed inside. So he crept beneath the shelter of the sill, and strained his quick ears.

For a time he could make out little of what the two men were saying. Then their voices rose, they became "much jolly", as he said, after the Portuguese had produced a flask of his own special brandy, and Mbutu heard every word distinctly. They were discussing a plan concerted between them during the journey to Kisumu, and congratulating each other on its success. The Arab, apparently, was connected with the chief against whom the punitive expedition was directed, and the dago having reasons of his own for desiring its failure, they had put their heads together. The result of their scheming was that the Arab had somehow got himself recommended to Captain Lister, the intelligence-officer of the expedition, as interpreter and guide, his real intention being to lead it into an ambush, cunningly devised between the chief and the Portuguese. The European officers were to be killed by picked marksmen in the first moments of confusion and the plotters hoped to lay their trap so carefully that not a soul would escape. What his master's motives were Mbutu had been unable to discover, though he had heard a mysterious reference to a store of ivory and a run of slaves. After a time the "special brandy" began to take effect, and both the men fell asleep. The light went out, and Mbutu stole away.

Tom only pieced this together by degrees. When the meaning of it all was clear to him, he gave a long whistle and stood staring at the black boy. Suddenly

a suspicion flashed across his mind as he remembered what he had read of the imaginativeness of the African native and his genius for inventing fairy tales.

"You're not making this up?" he said sternly. "Why didn't you tell all this before the expedition started?"

Mbutu spread out his hands.

"What for good?" he said. "Me tell? White man say 'Bosh! Liar! Get out!'" He shook his fist and lifted his foot with the accuracy of long experience. "Mbutu no lub kiboko. White man all same for one."

He pointed expressively to the scars and weals left on his shoulders by his recent thrashings with the kiboko.

"Then why have you told me now?" demanded Tom.

The boy for a few instants looked puzzled; then his features expanded in a cheerful smile as he said:

"No kiboko heah, sah! Sah little son of big sah! Sah Mbutu him fader and mudder!"

Tom could doubt no longer; truth spoke in every line and dimple of the boy's earnest face. But what was he to do? Glancing at the carriage clock on the mantel-piece, he saw that it wanted only ten minutes of seven, the hour fixed by Mr. Barkworth for dinner. He wondered if he had better consult his new friend, for whom he had already begun to entertain warm feelings of regard. Calling the major's Indian servant, he gave the boy into his hands with instructions to keep a sharp eye on him, and hurried off, his brain in a whirl.

"Ah, here you are, then!" said Mr. Barkworth, coming forward as Tom entered the bungalow, and laying a friendly hand on his shoulder. "Punctuality, now; that's a fine thing. The padre came a moment ago. I'll introduce you, h'm!"

He turned and led the way into an inner room, where Tom saw a figure that would have commanded attention in any company. It was that of a tall man of about fifty years, with clean-cut features of olive hue, mobile lips with the fine curves of a Roman orator's, and grayish hair falling back in flowing lines from his temples. He was dressed in the simple white robe of an Arab, with no ornament save a small gold cross pendent on his breast. The simplicity of his attire served only to heighten the natural dignity of his bearing.

"H'm! Mossoo--Mossoo-- Now, what on earth's the French for Thomas! Mossoo Tom Burnaby, Père Chevasse. And a fine fellow, sir," he added to Tom, *sotto voce*.

The missionary smiled as he shook hands.

"I have seen you already," he said in French. "I was a spectator the other day of that little scene, Mr. Burnaby, when you played the part of Good Samaritan."

"Ah!" said Mr. Barkworth, catching the phrase. "Who's been falling among thieves, padre?"

The missionary briefly told the story of Tom's summary treatment of the Portuguese, and though Mr. Barkworth's French was decidedly shaky, he made out a few leading words here and there, and got a tolerable grasp of the incident.

"Well now, I call that fine," he said; "Rule Britannia, and all that sort of thing, you know. And what became of the black boy? I warrant, now, he never even said thank you. No gratitude in these natives; I know 'em."

Tom was on the point of confuting Mr. Barkworth with the best of evidence, but Lilian's entrance checked the words as they rose to his lips, and by the time they were seated at the dinner-table his host's volatile mind was occupied with other matters.

Looking back on this dinner afterwards, Tom wondered how he managed to get through it without breaking down. He listened to the quiet, mellow voice of the missionary, and envied the fluency of Lilian's French; he smiled inwardly at Mr. Barkworth's desperate efforts to follow the conversation, and good-humoured laughter at his own mishaps; he even made his own modest contribution, and, after the first moments of diffidence, was put quite at his ease by the Frenchman's perfect courtesy. And yet, all the time, through all the talk, he felt one sentence dinning and throbbing in his head: "What am I to do? What am I to do?" He imagined his uncle in the depth of the forest, fighting for dear life amid a horde of savage blacks, and overborne at the last by sheer weight of numbers! A cold thrill shot through him, and he started, to answer haphazard some remark from Lilian or the missionary, not knowing what he said. Once or twice Lilian looked at him enquiringly, wondering at his strange absent-mindedness, and then he collected himself with an effort and tried to appear unconcerned.

After dinner Mr. Barkworth settled himself in an easy-chair and lit a cigar, and while the others sat chatting together he dropped asleep. The missionary gave his listeners an account of the work of the White Fathers' mission to which he belonged, and chanced to mention an incident that had occurred among a Bahima tribe. Bahima! That was the name of the race to which Mbutu belonged. Tom knew that his time was come. Speaking as quietly as his excitement allowed, he told Mbutu's story. The missionary looked incredulous; Lilian's fair cheeks paled, and she cried:

"Oh, what a wicked, wicked thing!"

"Eh? What?" said Mr. Barkworth, waking with a start. "As I was saying, these natives never show any gratitude. Now I remember a case when I was in Trinidad. An overseer there--"

But Lilian had seated herself at her father's feet, and laid her hand on his knee.

"Father," she said, "Mr. Burnaby has some strange and terrible news to tell you."

"God bless my soul, you don't say so! What in the world has happened?"

"Mr. Barkworth," said Tom, "the boy I saved from the Portuguese came to me to-day and told me of a diabolical plot between his master and the dragoman of the expedition to lead my uncle into a trap. What can be done to warn him?"

"What! What! Ambush Jack Burnaby! Ridiculous nonsense! Never heard of such a thing. More like a bit out of Henty than a real thing. H'm! Come now, what did the young rascal say?"

Tom repeated the story, giving, as nearly as he could, the minutest details told him by Mbutu.

Mr. Barkworth took out his handkerchief and blew his nose. "H'm! Cock-and-bull story altogether. I know these natives. Taradiddles, sir!"

"But why doubt the boy, sir? His story was so circumstantial, and he looked so earnest and truthful."

"H'm! What do you say about it, mossoo?"

"It is extraordinary, certainly," replied the Frenchman. "Could we not send for the boy? He would not try any tricks with me."

"Right! we'll have the boy. Fine thing--a knowledge of their gibberish. Hi, you there! Go down at once to Major Burnaby's bungalow and bring back the black boy there. Clutch him by the hair or he'll wriggle away. I know them."

One of the servants disappeared, and soon returned with Mbutu. The boy had been waked out of a sound sleep, and looked rather scared, but a few words in his own tongue from the missionary soon put him at ease, and he answered all his questions readily. After a searching examination Father Chevasse turned to Mr. Barkworth, saying:

"The boy's story is consistent in every part. I think he is telling the truth."

"Well, you ought to know, padre. What's to be done, then? We can't let a fine fellow like Jack Burnaby be snuffed out by a parcel of heathens. Suppose we tell the man in charge here--Captain Beaumont, isn't it?"

"Little use, I am afraid. Captain Beaumont doesn't understand the natives; and I fear he would scoff at Mbutu's story and refuse to believe it. The boy has an animus against the dago, you see."

"Why couldn't I go after the expedition myself along with Mbutu?" broke in Tom eagerly.

Mr. Barkworth looked dubiously at him, as though he half suspected for an instant that the story was got up for the occasion. But a glance at the young fellow's anxious face made him repent at once. He blew his nose again and said:

"I'm an old fool, h'm! Well now, let's talk it over."

A long and serious discussion ensued, in which Tom and Mr. Barkworth bore the greater part.

"Well, well," said Mr. Barkworth at length, "have your own way. Yes, my

boy, you must go. You have a valid reason--the strongest motive anyone could have. And your uncle, sir--begad, if he takes you to task for disobedience, why, just refer him to me, and say that I'll get Tommy Bowles to ask a question in the House. I know him!"

"But how can Mr. Burnaby go after them?" put in Lilian. "They have taken all the launches, I know."

Mr. Barkworth's countenance fell.

"Whew!" he ejaculated. "That's a facer! Never do to go on foot, Tom; never overtake 'em in time round the north shore. H'm!"

"I have a launch," said the missionary quietly. "Quite a small thing, steaming only a few knots. I am starting to-morrow to visit our station at Bukumbi, at the other end of the Nyanza, and if Mr. Burnaby cares to come with me, I can take him on afterwards to the river for which the expedition is making."

"Couldn't you go straight across, sir?" asked Tom eagerly. "You see how important it is to lose no time."

"I am sorry I cannot. I have important letters from my superior to the father in charge of the mission, and I am bound to deliver them at once. Besides, not much time will be lost. The launches are calling at Entebbe to pick up a draft of the King's African Rifles, so that we shall probably be only a day behind them, and you should overtake your uncle some days before he reaches the place where the fighting will begin."

"What's he say, Lilian?" said Mr. Barkworth in a stage whisper. "Capital!" he cried, when she had briefly explained; "his head's clear enough for an Englishman's. Close with Mossoo's offer, Mr. Burnaby. Ask the padre what time he starts, Lilian; for the life of me I never can think of the French for start."

"At eight in the morning," said the missionary. "If all goes well we shall cover a hundred miles before we anchor for the night."

"Well, now, that is what I call business. Now, Tom, you'll be ready at eight with this Booty, or whatever you call him, and I'll be there to see you off. Gad, if I hadn't a girl to drag me about I'd come too, though I'm sixty-three next week. Now, good-night, my boy, and God bless you!"

Tom gripped the old gentleman's hand warmly, and after wishing Lilian good-bye, went off with the White Father to talk over their plans and trace out their route before turning in for the night.

CHAPTER III

On the Victoria Nyanza

Tom's First Crocodile--Night on the Nyanza--In German Africa--A Storm on the Lake--A Short Way with Hippos--Danger Ahead

Long before eight next morning Tom was down at the quay examining the launch in which he was to begin his pursuit of the expedition. His inspection made him feel rather unhappy.

"Why, she's nothing but a crazy old tub," he said to himself ruefully. "Planks half-rotten, rudder stiff, and looks as though she hadn't seen paint for an age. Lucky this isn't open sea, for anything like dirty weather would just about finish her ramshackle engines. Well, let's hope for the best."

He returned to the bungalow, where with Mbutu's assistance he made his final preparations. These were not elaborate. The padre had advised him to travel as light as possible, taking merely a few articles of underclothing and other necessaries, with the addition of a couple of hundred beads and some yards of calico, the common articles of barter and sale in the interior, in case he had to purchase food from the natives during the final stage of his journey. Luckily there was a fair stock of these in the bungalow. Tom had of course discarded his straw hat long before, and now wore a white solah helmet, which could be relied on to protect him from the mid-day sun. He had found an old rifle of his uncle's, and a case of cartridges, which he thought it advisable to take. He ate a light breakfast of fried fowl capitally prepared by the Indian, gravely acknowledged his salaam, and then, giving Mbutu the baggage to carry, started for the quay.

The missionary was already on board, and steam was up, but there was no sign of Mr. Barkworth. Tom wondered whether he had forgotten his promise to see him off. Just as he was about to go on board, his genial friend appeared in the distance, hurrying at a great pace towards the quay, flourishing a red bandana. Tom was surprised, and secretly not a little pleased, to see that Lilian was with her father.

"Here we are," cried the old gentleman, puffing and gasping as he came up. "All on board, h'm? Got everything you want? Now, whatever you do, don't get your feet wet! And look here, here's something I warrant you've forgotten. Writing-paper, eh? Ink too. Let us know how you get on. Any black 'll carry a letter for you for a few beads. My girl will have dragged me off to the ends of the earth long before you get back, but remember we're always home for Christmas. Glad to see you at the Orchard, Winterslow, any time. Now, then, good luck to you, and God save the King!"

Mr. Barkworth shoved a folding writing-case into Tom's left hand, gripped

his right heartily, and waggled it up and down till he was tired.

"Good-bye, Mr. Burnaby!" said Lilian, "and I do hope you will succeed."

Tom shook hands, lifted his hat, and stepped on board. The crazy engine made a great fluster as it sent the screw round; the launch sheered off, and Tom stood side by side with the padre, watching Mr. Barkworth waving his hat and Lilian her handkerchief until they were out of sight. After seeing that Mbutu was safe in the company of the native stoker, who formed the whole crew of the little vessel, Tom placed a camp-stool under the awning by the side of the missionary's deck-chair near the steering-wheel, and looked about him.

The launch was cutting its way slowly through the brown sluggish waters of Kavirondo Bay. The shore was flat and uninteresting, part bare rock, part rank marsh, spotted here and there with sacred ibises in their beautiful black-and-white plumage. At several points along the bank Tom saw a huge plant like an overgrown cabbage run to stalk, or rather to many stalks, sticking out of a short swollen stem, like the arms of a candelabra. This, the padre told him, was the candelabra euphorbia, a plant of which the natives stood very much in dread, because its juice was highly poisonous, and because it was so top-heavy and so loosely rooted that in a high wind it frequently toppled over, with damaging effect to anything that might be within its shade.

As they emerged from the bay into the open lake, the water changed its brown to a deep and beautiful blue, and the shore became more interesting. The lake here was fringed with a thick growth of rushes--long smooth green stems crowned by a mop-head of countless green filaments becoming ever finer and more silky towards the end. Amid the vegetation appeared the forms of whale-headed storks with yellow eyes, and gold-brown otters with white bellies darted in and out among the rushes. There was a light wind off-shore, and Tom had a distant view of many wild denizens of the lake country, which would otherwise have been alarmed by the throb of the engines. His companion lent him a field-glass, and for hours he revelled in the panorama of tropical life that passed before his eyes. At one point he saw an antelope come down a wooded slope to the edge of the water. What seemed to be a green moss-covered log of wood lay almost hidden from the animal by the bulging bank. The antelope had just put his fore-feet into the water when the log moved, one end of it parted into two yawning jaws, and for the first time in his life Tom saw a crocodile in its native element. The trembling antelope started back, just escaped the snap of the huge hungry jaws, and bounded back into the forest.

Tom could not resist the temptation to try a shot at the slimy reptile. He took careful aim and fired. The crocodile slid off the half-submerged sand-bank on which it was basking, and disappeared in the water.

"Did I hit it, sir?" he asked eagerly.

"It is impossible to say. It may merely have been startled by the report, and we could only make sure by waiting to see if its body rises."

"And that, of course, we can't do," said Tom with a sigh.

The launch sped on and on, steaming now her full seven knots. Tom noticed that she was never very far from the land, and knowing, from his look at the map overnight, that Bukumbi was almost in the centre of the southern shore, he wondered why the padre did not steer a more westerly course. He asked the question.

"Well," said the missionary, "it is partly custom and partly superstition, I suspect. Everyone is shy of sailing directly across from north to south or east to west. Many of our launches are hardly tight craft, as you see, and a storm would be a very serious matter in the open."

"But surely there are no storms on an inland lake?"

"There are indeed. The wind here sometimes lashes the water into waves as high as any you can see on the English Channel. Gales have blown the native dhows out into the open, and they have never returned. The natives, too, will tell you that a huge monster inhabits the waters near one of the many islands that stud the lake; there it lies in wait to suck their craft down. I have never seen it myself," he added with a smile, "but I once heard your Sir Harry Johnston say that he had looked into the matter, and was rather inclined to believe that the monster was a manatee."

Still they sailed on. After sixty miles or so they left British territory and came into German East Africa, and soon the tropical forest which had clothed the highlands sloping back from the shore, gave place to more level grassland, some of which was evidently under cultivation. The shore was indented in many narrow creeks, and in one of these Tom saw a singular-looking canoe, at least fifty feet long, manned by a dozen naked Baganda. The keel of this, the padre told him, was a single tree-stem, the interior of which had been chipped out with axes and burnt out with fire. When the keel was finished, holes were bored in it at intervals with a red-hot iron spike; the planks for the sides were similarly pierced; and then wattles made of the rind of the raphia palm were passed through the holes, and planks and keel were literally sewn together. All chinks and holes were then stopped with grease, and the whole canoe, inside and out, was smeared with a coating of vermilion-coloured clay. The prow projected some feet beyond the nose of the boat, and sloped upwards from the water. The top of it, Tom observed, was decorated with a pair of horns, and connected with the beak by a rope from which hung a fringe of grass and filaments from the banana-tree. When the occupants of the canoe caught sight of the White Father, they struck their paddles into the water, and drove their slender craft rapidly towards the launch. But the padre made signs that he was in a great hurry and could not stop to speak to them, and

after a time they desisted and paddled back to the shore.

"Though I believe they could have overtaken us if they chose," said the missionary. "I have known them propel their canoes at six or seven miles an hour."

"Mr. Barkworth would call them fine fellows," remarked Tom with a smile. "I always had an idea that the natives of these parts were a puny, stunted set of people, but really those fellows in the canoe are splendid specimens."

The sun set, and the moon rose, and still the launch panted along. At last, when it was nearly ten o'clock, and the log showed close upon a hundred miles, the padre ran the boat into a wide creek, where he anchored for the night.

Tom looked weary and heavy-eyed when he greeted the missionary about six o'clock next morning.

"Your wild neighbours are rather too much for me," he said. "I did not sleep a wink till near daylight. Never in my life have I heard such weird noises."

"And I slept like a top," said the padre, smiling. "What were the noises that disturbed you?"

"Well, there was, for one thing, the squawk of the night-jar, which was unmistakeable; then there was the croak of frogs, only this was louder than our English frogs can manage, just like the sound of a gong beaten slowly. But there was a curious chirping, like a lot of bells very much out of tune jingling at a distance. What was that?"

"That was made by hundreds of cicadas in the reeds."

"Then an owl hooted, and some old lion set up a roar, and then again there came a strange bark I never heard before; it began with a snap, and rose higher and higher in pitch, till it became a miserable howl that gave me the shivers."

"That was the jackal."

"An eerie brute," rejoined Tom. "One answered another until there was a whole chorus of them at it, all trying to howl each other down. But worst of all was a dreadful squeal, just like a baby in mortal pain. I was dozing when I heard that; I became wide-awake with a start, and jumped up, and then remembered where I was. It couldn't have been a baby, could it, Padre?"

"No; it was no doubt a monkey which had climbed down from the branches of some mimosa, and found itself in the coils of a snake. You will get used to that sort of thing if you spend many nights in Uganda. But now, steam is up, I see; we must be off."

"There is one thing that has been puzzling me," said Tom. "Last night you told me we were now in German East Africa. But how is it that you have a French mission in German territory?"

"The explanation is simple. We were here before the Germans. This great lake was discovered by your Captain Speke in 1858, you remember, but it was not until Stanley came here in 1875 that the attention of Europe was really called

to Uganda. You have heard, no doubt, of Stanley's famous letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, asking for missionaries to be sent out here?"

"I can't say I have."

"Well, when Stanley came, he found the king, Mtesa, much perplexed about religious matters, and he wrote a letter asking that English missionaries might be sent out to evangelize the people. A friend of Gordon's, a Belgian named Linant de Bellefonds, happened to be here at the time, and he volunteered to take Stanley's letter to Europe by way of the Nile. On the way, poor fellow, he was murdered by the Bari, who threw his corpse on to the bank, where it lay rotting in the sun. An expedition sent to punish the Bari found poor Bellefonds' body, and on removing his long knee-boots they discovered the letter tucked in between boot and leg. It was sent to Gordon at Khartum, and thence to England, and thus it came about that your Church of England mission began its work in Uganda in 1877."

"But how did you come here?"

"Oh, our mission, as I told you the other night, was started by Cardinal Lavigerie at Tanganyika. He thought that France should not be behind England in good works, so he sent some of his White Fathers northward to Uganda, and that is how we came to have a station at Bukumbi."

"What about the Germans, then?"

"After the missionary comes the trader. Your Joseph Thomson was the first to prove what splendid commercial prospects Uganda presented, and then, of course, there was a scramble. It would be too long a story to tell you of treaties and schemes; of the fickleness and treachery of the vicious King Mwanga; of Lugard and Gerald Portal and Sir Harry Johnston. But in 1890 Central Africa was parcelled out among Britain and Germany and the King of the Belgians, and you British, with your genius for colonization, have really done wonderful things. I admire your success; and there is one thing at least in which you and we are quite agreed--we both detest slavery, and the slave knows that whether he flies to the British trader's bungalow or the mission-house of the White Fathers, he is sure of protection."

The day passed uneventfully. Tom went down once or twice to relieve the native at the engine, and after what the missionary had told him of the storms that sometimes arose on the lake, he hoped more than ever that the crazy machinery would be equal to the strain put upon it.

About seven in the evening the launch came to the mouth of the Bay of Bukumbi. There was a good deal of sea running, and it took the Father, with Tom's assistance, more than half an hour before they found, in the darkness, among the tall swishing reeds, a place where they could land. The task was at length accomplished; leaving Mbutu and the stoker on board, the padre and Tom went ashore, and met with a warm welcome from the fathers at the station. They dined

and slept at the mission-house, and left early next morning, taking some fresh food on board. Father Chevasse wished to make direct for the Sese Islands at the north-west of the Nyanza, where the White Fathers had another station, but he found it necessary to put in for fuel at Muanza, some two hours' sail from Bukumbi. While he went to visit an acquaintance there, Tom strolled about the station, wondering at the bare and desolate appearance of its surroundings. He learned afterwards that the Germans had cut down the trees and burnt the villages within five miles of their fort--an infallible specific for keeping the country quiet. As he sauntered along he was half-startled, half-amused, to hear a native servant addressing a young subaltern, evidently fresh from the Fatherland, in a queer jargon of broken German. The effect was even more ludicrous than the broken English of Kisumu.

Tom's next impression was of a different kind. Turning into a narrow thoroughfare off the main street, he came face to face with a German captain in full uniform, swaggering along with elbows well stuck out, and two inches of moustache stiffly perpendicular, militant and aggressive. There was very little room to pass. The path was narrow; on one side was a wall, on the other a muddy road very badly cut up by cart-wheels. It was clearly an occasion for mutual concession. But the German does not go to Africa to make concessions, Tom was obviously a civilian, and, by all the rules of the German social system, beyond the pale of military courtesy. To the German officer it was as if he were not there. The captain came on with the rigid strut of an automaton, taking it for granted that Tom would efface himself against the wall. But he had failed to recognize that the civilian was not a German. Seeing that a collision was inevitable, Tom conceded the utmost consistent with self-respect, and stiffened his back for the rest. There was a sharp jolt; the automaton, inflexibly rigid, swung round as on a pivot, clutched vainly at Tom for support, and subsided into the mud.

"Sorry, I'm sure," said Tom blandly. "Hope you're not hurt. The path is narrow."

White with anger, the German sprang to his feet, and, with the instinct of one not long from Berlin, laid his hand on his sword. But the tall figure walking unconcernedly on was unmistakeably that of an Englishman, and the angry captain scowled ineffectually at Tom's back, and made a hasty toilet before starting to regain his bungalow by the less-frequented thoroughfares.

The padre was vexed when Tom told him of the incident.

"It was Captain Stumpff," he said, "commandant of the German station at Fort Bukoba near your frontier. He has no love for you English, and now he will like you less than ever. Not that his friendship is worth much. He is a boor, and a terror to the natives. The Germans are so much hated that the natives about here call them Wa-daki, 'the men of wrath', and well they deserve the name. Even the Portuguese are mild by comparison, and that is saying a good deal. Now as

regards our journey, as we have been delayed at Muanza longer than I anticipated, I propose to steer straight across instead of hugging the shore. The weather is fine, and we shall save time in that way."

The launch went ahead at full speed, passing within about half a mile of the wooded island of Kome. Tom again found plenty of use for the field-glass, watching the myriad water-fowl of all descriptions that haunt the reedy shore of the lake. The air was beautifully clear, and if his mission had been less urgent Tom would have dearly liked to explore some of the creeks, fringed with tropical vegetation, that run up seemingly for miles into the land.

Gradually, however, they left the shore behind, and in a few hours the coast-line was but a hazy fringe on the horizon. They were by this time well out on the Nyanza, and the padre noticed with concern that the sky toward the north-east was assuming a leaden hue. The wind had freshened from the same quarter; the surface of the lake was changing; white-tipped waves came rolling up on the starboard side. In a few minutes, as it seemed, the sky became black; and then, with a sudden gust, a terrific storm of rain burst over the boat, drenching Tom and the missionary to the skin. The wind blew with ever-increasing force, sweeping the rain in sheets before it; the sea was being lashed to fury, and big waves broke with a swish over the deck. It was all that the men could do to keep their feet. Mbutu, perturbed both in body and mind, clung desperately to the handrail of the companionway; the native stoker was beside himself with terror, and in no condition to execute an order even if he could hear it above the tumult of the gale. The padre, wholly occupied with the wheel, shouted to Tom to keep an eye on the engine. Creeping across the deck, Tom made the best of his way below, with some difficulty closing the hatch above him. Just as he secured the hatch, a huge sea broke over the vessel, carrying away deck-chair and camp-stool, snapping the stanchions of the awning as though they were match-wood, and sweeping the ruins into the sea, among them the rifle which Tom had stood against the gunwale.

Having tumbled rather than run down the companion-way, Tom staggered to the engine and examined the gauge. He thought it possible to crowd on a little more steam, and as there was no chance of consulting the missionary, on his own responsibility he flung more logs on the fire. Meanwhile the boat was rolling and pitching terribly; every moment a heavy thud resounded as a wave broke on the deck; and Tom could hear the straining of the rudder as the missionary strove to keep the vessel's head to the wind.

The fight had gone on for an hour or more, when all at once the screw ceased to revolve; there was an escape of steam; and Tom knew that what he had for some time been dreading had at last occurred. The engine had broken down. Reversing the lever he clambered on deck, and saw by the expression in the padre's face that

he knew what had happened. The downpour had ceased, but the wind was still blowing a furious gale, and, with no way on the boat, the rudder was useless.

"What is to be done?" shouted Tom in the padre's ear.

"Nothing. We are bound to drift; we are already driving towards the shore. Heaven send we miss the rocks!"

Both men clung to the wheel, and watched anxiously as the launch, shuddering under the waves that struck her in close succession, drew nearer and nearer to the shore. Tom could already see the foaming breakers rolling wildly against a huge rock that loomed up a hundred yards ahead. A few seconds more, and he expected the keel to strike. The missionary was alive to their imminent peril. Cutting loose a light mast, he hurried with it to the port side, and just as a wave smote the vessel on the other quarter, lifting it almost on to the rock, he thrust out the mast and pushed with all his might. Tom gave a gasp of relief. The vessel shaved the rock by a hand's-breadth, and sped past. A second later it was brought up with a sudden jerk, plunged forward a few yards, and then came finally to a stop.

"We are on a sand-bank," cried the padre. "If the storm continues we shall be broken up in half an hour."

"Can't we do anything, sir?" asked Tom.

"Nothing but trust to Providence."

Happily, not many minutes after the launch had grounded, the wind began to lull, and by the time it was dark had entirely fallen. With the suddenness characteristic of storms on the Nyanza, the force of the breakers rapidly diminished, the sky cleared, and the stars came out.

"I'm going down to see what's wrong with the engine," said Tom, dripping wet as he was. Fortunately he found a candle and dry matches. He struck a light and crept into the machinery. Ten minutes' examination showed him that the strain had loosened the valve connecting the steam-pipe with the cylinder, so that the pressure was inadequate to move the piston-rod. He had sufficient experience to know that he could repair it well enough to stand for a day or two. Coming out again he ordered Mbutu and the stoker, now recovered from their fright, to bale out the water that had shipped below; then he stripped off his clothes and wrung them out, dressed himself again, and set about his task.

By this time it was eight o'clock in the evening. The padre, having dried his clothes as well as he could, went below to see if he could lend Tom a hand; Tom thanked him, but said he thought he could manage by himself, and suggested that the missionary might order Mbutu to prepare some supper. In about three hours Tom came on deck tired and dirty.

"It's done, Father," he said. "The old thing's patched at last. It will stand till you get back to Port Florence, I think."

"Well done, Mr. Burnaby!" returned the padre. "It is wonderful good luck that I had such a skilful engineer on board."

"Well, you see, I had some experience in Glasgow," said Tom modestly. "And then the chief engineer on the *Peninsular* showed me all over his engines, and taught me a lot. Shall we fire up to-night?"

"No, I think we'll lay by till morning and get what sleep we can. Then I hope with the dawn we shall be able to run off the sand-bank. I have made some cocoa, and I am sure you must be hungry."

Tom was so fatigued that as soon as he laid his head down after a good meal he fell asleep. Five hours slipped by like twenty minutes, and then he was awakened soon after daybreak by a loud snorting bellow that seemed to shake the vessel. Bounding on deck he found the padre already there, looking with dismay at a crowd of hippopotamuses sporting in their lumbering way among the rushes. The animals appeared to have just discovered the launch, and to have decided that it was an intruder into their domains, to be summarily ejected, for one great bull lifted his thick snout and, furiously bellowing, charged. The impact stove in a plank just above water-line, and lifted the vessel half out of the water. The stoker yelled with terror. Mbutu snatched up the mast that had proved of such good service the day before, while the padre looked anxious. There were no arms on board, and Tom bitterly regretted that he had not left his rifle below instead of keeping it with him on deck. Suddenly an idea struck him. Placing his hand on the funnel he found, as he had hoped, that the engine-fire was alight. He ran below, picked up a length of hose he had noticed coiled near one of the bunkers, fixed one end to the exhaust-pipe, and hurried back to the deck, carrying the nozzle end with him. Instructing the stoker to turn on the cock at a signal, he went into the bows and saw the hippo preparing for a second charge. Shouting to the stoker, he pointed the hose full at the eyes of the gigantic beast; a stream of boiling water issued from it, and the hippo, bellowing with pain, plunged off the bank with a force that shook the vessel, and lumbered away. His companions watched him for a few seconds with a look of dull amazement, and then, taking in the situation, stampeded after him.

"The enemy retires in confusion," said Tom, laughing.

"A capital idea of yours," said the missionary. "I confess I was really somewhat alarmed. After all, I believe the brute has helped us. I fancy he shifted us a little off the bank. Put on the steam, and let us see if we can move."

Tom went below and pressed the throttle. The vessel did not stir. There was not sufficient depth of water. Hurrying on deck again he asked the padre to push from the stern with the serviceable mast; and after a few minutes' hard shoving at various places, he had the satisfaction of feeling the launch move an inch or two forward. Returning below he started the engine, and ten minutes later the

boat slid off the sandbank into deep water. Fortunately no harm had been done to the bottom. The engine worked well, though Tom did not venture to put it at full speed after the strain of the previous day. Skirting the western shore, the vessel passed Bukoba in the afternoon, and about five o'clock arrived at the mouth of a river emerging into the lake through dense forest.

"This is the Ruezi," said the padre. "The expedition has gone up this river. I am glad, my dear boy, that in God's providence I have been able to bring you safely to this point, and I don't forget how much we all owe to your skill and presence of mind. Now I must land you here. I can take you in until the water is shallow enough for you to wade ashore. You will find a village half a mile or so inland, and your future course must depend on what information you there obtain. I am not very clear about the nature of the country, but the expedition will have left very distinct traces. I need not say I wish you every success, and on your return I shall hope to see more of you."

"Many thanks for all your kindness, Father!" said Tom, shaking hands warmly. "I'll look you up, never fear."

"Take my field-glass; you may find it useful," said the padre. "I have already packed up some tea and a few other things for you, and Mbutu has a couple of rugs; you will find nights in the open rather cold. Good-bye, good-bye!"

The boy slipped overboard with the baggage, Tom following immediately. They reached the shore after some trouble with the rushes, and Tom there waved a final farewell to the missionary, whom the launch was already bearing away northwards towards the Sese Islands.

At the same moment, out of a clump of elephant-grass some three hundred yards up the river, came a long vermilion canoe manned by eight negroes. In the stern sat a European in a green coat. Catching sight of the two figures by the riverside he sprang up, appeared to hesitate, then gave a sudden order. The canoe swung round, and barely a minute after it had emerged from the rushes it disappeared again, rapidly moving under the strokes of eight red paddles.

Not, however, before Mbutu's sharp eyes had flashed a glance at it. He uttered a low cry, and turned to Tom.

"Dago man, sah!"

"Where?" said Tom, wheeling landwards with a start.

"Ober dar, sah. Long canoe, dago man in green coat. Sah knock him down."

"Nonsense! You can't see clearly all that way. It must have been someone else."

"Dago, sure nuff," returned the boy positively. "Mbutu know eyes, nose, coat, kiboko, all berrah much."

"Ho, ho! So the dago is here, is he? Now I wonder what he is after. He couldn't have known we were coming, that's certain. He must have started before

us--perhaps on the track of the expedition. Well, Mbutu, we must find out what his game is. Did he see you, d'you think?"

"See Mbutu? Yes. Sah too. Dago see all much. Sah knock him down!"

"Well, I hope I shall not have to knock him down again. We must keep our eyes open, Mbutu; remember, my uncle's life in all probability depends on our running no risks."

"All right, sah! Big sah, little sah, all same for one."

CHAPTER IV

A Stern Chase

An African Village--A Bargain--A False Scent--Up the Ruezi--A Night Vigil--Followed--The Bend in the River--A Man Wounded--No Thoroughfare

The two youths found themselves on a narrow spit of sand projecting some hundred yards into the river-mouth. On the land side Tom saw nothing but a dense wall of elephant-grass and papyrus standing nearly twice as high as himself, into which the river disappeared. On the other side was the blue expanse of the Nyanza, shading into the lighter blue of the cloudless sky. In the distance he could see the faint coast-line of the Sese Islands, and, between himself and them, the smoke of the departing launch stretching across the sky like a long smudge on a clean page. For the first time a shadow of misgiving crossed his mind, but with a silent "This will never do" he pulled himself together, and set himself resolutely to face the task he had undertaken.

He looked meditatively for a few moments at Mbutu.

"Now, Mbutu," he said, "we are left to our own devices. I must trust to you to help me through; I suppose you can make yourself understood in any of these parts, eh? Well now, you stick by me and do your best, and you and I'll be great friends. Now for this village."

Mbutu shouldered the baggage, and they set off towards the apparently impenetrable wall. They were soon ankle-deep in swamp, but, rounding a point and wading a little creek, they came upon a narrow path, evidently worn away by many feet tramping down in single file to the river-side. Striking up this path they were met in another ten minutes by signs of human habitation. There were fields of sweet-potatoes, Indian-corn, and millet, traversing which they came plump

upon an irregular circle of grass huts, half-hidden by the surrounding bush.

Tom called a halt. It would be well, he thought, to impress the villagers with an idea of his importance, so he despatched Mbutu in advance, as a herald, to announce his arrival to the chief of the village. Passing the line of grass huts, and picking his way amid fowls and goats and a rather unsavoury litter, Tom found himself in a spacious enclosure, which was already filling with a crowd of jabbering natives. The centre of this open space was occupied by a hut of larger dimensions than the rest. It was a round structure, consisting of boughs of trees held together by grass and mud, and surmounted by a conical roof, roughly thatched. The doorway was low, and not more than eighteen inches wide; Tom wondered whether the chief would come out, and if not, how he himself was to get in. Mbutu, he saw, was talking rapidly and with much gesticulation to a corpulent negro at the door of the hut, while a group of natives stood intently watching at a respectful distance.

As Tom approached, Mbutu came towards him grinning.

"Him say him katikiro," he said. "Him lie; him katikiro not much. Big chief hab katikiro, little chief no hab."

"What on earth is katikiro?" asked Tom.

Mbutu looked puzzled and scratched his head. After pondering a while, and searching for words to make the matter clear to his master's intelligence, he said:

"Katikiro palaver man. Chief want eat--call katikiro. Chief want wife--call katikiro. Want gib bad man kiboko--call katikiro all same."

"Sort of head cook and bottle-washer, lord high executioner and prime minister all in one, eh? Well, tell the right honourable katikiro I want to see the chief."

"Him say chief asleep."

"Then he must wake him up."

Mbutu spoke to the negro, who shook his head, looked very serious, and, pointing to the hut behind, answered quickly and earnestly.

"Him say chief chop off head," grinned Mbutu. "Chief berrah big, oh!"

"He must chance that!" replied Tom. "Tell him that if he and his master keep me dawdling here any longer, I shall report both of them to the government at Entebbe, and then they'll be sorry."

If Tom had understood Mbutu's interpretation of his speech he would have heard him inform the native that his master's big brother, the Great White King, would take away the chief's wives and goats, charms and beads, and leave him not so much as an anklet to call his own. He would pull his teeth, shave his head, and make him wash himself in hot water twice a day. Mbutu was proceeding to amplify these threats with great eloquence when Tom, losing patience, cried: "If he doesn't hurry up, I shall go in and wake the chief myself," and he made a movement towards the hut. Instantly the man, with a terrified look, took a long

breath, turned sideways, and squeezed his rotundity through the narrow aperture. His entrance was followed by a stream of very hot language, and in a moment the katikiro reappeared, looking somewhat crestfallen. He was followed immediately by the chief, a well-made negro, scowling and rubbing his eyes. He presented a comical appearance in his torn calico shirt and head-dress consisting of a piece of lion's skin ingeniously ornamented with stork's feathers. Tom went up to him and held out his hand frankly, a courtesy he regretted at once, for on emerging from the chief's grip he found his hand covered with dirty grease. Still smiling, however, he made as impressive an oration as he could, and then asked through Mbutu if the chief could tell him anything about the expedition. Mbutu added on his own account that he had better tell no lies, for his master was a near relative of the Great White King, and moreover had been given by a medicine man the power to see through the back of any black man's head. He further promised on Tom's behalf that the truth would be repaid with a good many beads, while falsehood would entail unspeakable consequences.

Thus encouraged, the chief spat on the ground and began. He stated that the expedition had arrived at the mouth of the Ruezi two days before. The river being impracticable for launches, the men had landed at a creek a mile or two away, and had there begun their overland march. They were bound for Mpororo, a place the chief knew only by hearsay, as he himself had never ventured farther than the southern end of Lake Mazingo. Beyond that, he understood, were the tents of the Wa-daki, who lived night and day with kiboko; and as he named the dreaded Germans, his eyes flashed and his nostrils dilated.

"I don't understand this," said Tom. "The Ruezi looks a big enough river. Why couldn't the launches sail up?"

The chief explained that the bed was here and there silted with mud, and everywhere more or less overgrown with reeds.

"Then I suppose we shall have to tramp after them. Couldn't we reach this Lake Mazingo by the river?"

The chief was sorry to say that they would have to walk through the forest.

"Isn't your river deep enough for a canoe, then?"

Oh yes! A light canoe could paddle up to Lake Mazingo, but beyond that were the tents of the Wa-daki, who lived night and day--

"Yes, yes," interrupted Tom. "Why couldn't the old guy tell us that before! Tell him I'll hire a canoe with its crew, and that we'll start at once."

But he reckoned without his chief. It took Mbutu over an hour to conclude the bargain, the chief asking for one thing after another in payment, and showing a special desire for Tom's scarf-pin. When the price had finally been fixed at a number of beads, an old clasp-knife, ten yards of calico, and a couple of boot-laces, a further difficulty arose. The chief absolutely refused to allow his men to

start at night: journeys begun beneath a full moon were of ill omen, he said, and Mbutu himself was superstitious enough to sympathize with him. Anxious as Tom was to get on, he saw that it would be unwise to press the chief any further, and accordingly arranged that the light canoe, with a crew of four strong paddlers, should be at his disposal at daybreak next morning.

"Now, Mbutu," said Tom, "just ask him if he has seen anything of the Portuguese we caught a glimpse of just now."

No, the chief had not seen the white man in the green coat, but a moon before he had seen one of the Wa-daki, who lived night and--

"Bother the Wa-daki! Just tell him that if he does see anything of the dago he is to say nothing about us. Does he understand? And none of his men is to say anything either. You'd better impress that on the katikiro too."

Mbutu having carried out his master's instructions in his own decorative way, Tom, with much ceremony, presented the chief with half a dozen yellow beads and a pocket handkerchief, dexterously avoided his greasy paw, and despatched Mbutu to find a place, away from the malodorous village, where they might comfortably pass the night.

Next morning they were up betimes. Tom was ravenously hungry, but did not feel happy at the thought of eating anything prepared in the village. He was surprised when Mbutu brought him an earthen pot filled with excellent tea, a slice of fried goat, and a few chapatties made, as he afterwards learnt, of banana-flour.

"Upon my word, Mbutu," he said, "I shall have to make you my katikiro right away."

Mbutu beamed his delight. Their breakfast finished, they went to find their canoe. It was already lying in the creek they had crossed on the previous evening. The crew were four muscular Baganda dressed in nothing but loin-cloths and grease, who all began to jabber at once as Tom approached.

"What do they say?" Tom asked.

"Say you fader and mudder, sah. All belong sah; huts belong sah; food belong sah; eberyfing belong sah."

"That's very kind of them, I'm sure. I wish they'd wash off that grease, though. What shall I say to them, Mbutu?"

"Me palaver man; me katikiro, sah."

Mbutu told the men that his master was their father and mother; would build up their huts if by any chance they were destroyed during their absence; would give their children charms to preserve them from snake-bites and the sleeping sickness; and as a token of sincerity in these pledges would eat a sheep with them at the first opportunity. They snapped their fingers and smiled, and looked with great reverence at the unconscious Tom, who had been in a brown study while his henchman was speaking.

"I've been thinking, Mbutu," he said; "suppose the Portuguese has been hanging about. If he recognized you he is sure to suspect that I know rather too much about him now, and he may be on the watch for us. We should be no match for him and his eight men if they happen to be armed. What do you think?"

"Sah fink; tell Mbutu."

"Well now, if they are on our track they won't be far away. Just ask these fellows if the river bends at all."

The men declared that the water bent like a bow to south, a half-hour's paddling from where they were.

"Then you and I, Mbutu, will cut across country and meet the canoe by and by. I suppose there's a way?"

Yes; the crew said there was a path through a stretch of thin forest, which rejoined the river after about five miles.

"The very thing. Now, tell these fellows that if a white man in a green coat meets them, and asks after us, they are to say that a white man is in their village, and that they are sent to summon the chief of another village--they can give it a name--to a grand palaver about food for the expedition on its way back."

Mbutu repeated these instructions, adding that the green-coated man had a particularly keen kiboko. The quick-witted natives appreciated at once the part they were to play, and chuckled with enjoyment. They took their seats on the poles which, placed transverse through holes in the sides of the canoe, served as thwarts, struck their paddles into the water, and, raising their voices in a curious chant, drove their red-coloured bark rapidly up-stream.

Tom watched them till they were out of sight among the reeds, then turned and strode off with Mbutu. All their baggage and a stock of food were in the canoe; Tom had nothing but his field-glass and a light switch he had cut that morning from a tree. It was seven o'clock, and the sun being not yet high, marching would not have been unpleasant but for the heavy dew upon the long grass and spreading plants over which they had to walk. Very soon they were soaked to the waist, and Tom thought that Mbutu with his bare legs had decidedly the best of it. Their progress through the forest was not rapid, owing to the tangle of vegetation through which they had at times to force a way. It was nearly nine before they saw the river again. The canoe was waiting for them, and Mbutu ran ahead. Tom could see by the excited way in which the crew gabbled and gesticulated that something had happened. When he reached them, Mbutu informed him that the canoe had been hailed by the Portuguese, who had been lying in wait for them in a creek some three miles up the river. He had questioned the crew, who, after giving him the message as had been arranged, had seen him paddle back hurriedly towards the mouth of the river. They had noticed that all his men were armed with rifles, and volubly regretted that they had been unable to fight

him.

"They're as pleased as Punch at having outwitted him, anyhow," said Tom. "Tell them I'll give them some beads for doing so well. Now, Mbutu, you go in the bow, I'll take the stern, and we'll see how these fellows paddle."

The men struck their paddles into the water, and, keeping perfect time, sent the canoe along at a swinging pace. They accompanied their strokes with a crooning chant, the words sounding something like this--

Nsologumba kanpitepite kunyanja
Nsologumba oluilaita kunyanja
Nsologumba lekanpitepite kunyanja.

Tom knew his elements of music, and could take his part in "Willow the King"; but the notes of this tune fitted no scale he had ever heard of. The same words were repeated again and again for half an hour at a stretch, until he felt rather tired of them.

"I wish they'd turn on another tap," he said to himself, "but I suppose their feelings would be hurt if I told them so. Mbutu, my boy, what's their song about?"

Mbutu turned up the whites of his eyes in the effort to translate, then chanted solemnly:

"Man all alone row up de ribber, man all alone row up de ribber, man all alone row up de ribber; alone de man row up ribber, alone de man row up--"

"Thanks! I know it by heart now. D'you think you could tell them a story, Mbutu? Anything to keep them quiet. The man all alone wants to think, tell them."

"All right, sah! berrah well, sah! Me tell story about uncle and croc'dile--berrah nice story, sah!"

"Very well; make it as long as you like."

"Uncle, sah, in canoe, all alone row up de ribber. Uncle, sah--"

"Quite so, but you can tell me the story another time. I want you to keep the crew amused, you understand."

Mbutu looked rather disappointed, but at once began to unfold his story to the negroes, who listened with strained attention, breaking out at intervals into guffaws of pleasure and cries of amazement.

Meanwhile Tom looked about him. The crew had evidently performed this journey before, for they dexterously skirted the shallows, and appeared to know exactly where to pull to avoid the encroaching reeds. Beyond the reeds the banks were lined with splendid trees, some with white trunks, others with gray, others with black; the foliage of vivid green; the blossoms of many hues--crimson, scarlet, lilac, yellow, white. On some of them india-rubber vines had fastened themselves in long loops and festoons. The river itself shone in the sunlight like a

pathway of polished metal. Here and there it seemed to cease to be a river at all, and became a mere lagoon, and at such spots Tom saw more than one rhinoceros wallowing, their horned snouts just out of the water. As the canoe progressed, the rushes were less dense; a thick wall of soft-wood plants came into view; raphia-palms with their huge fronds, wild bananas with their enormous leaves, the slender stems of date-palms, crowned with graceful plumage of the richest green. The air was still, save now and again when the canoe disturbed a haunt of water-fowl, or a parrot flew squawking among the reeds, or a covey of beautifully-coloured widow-finches darted from shrub to shrub uttering their harsh little cries. Occasionally the canoe passed a tree on which innumerable monkeys were chattering and squabbling. Once Tom's ear caught the inimitable trill of a thrush, reminding him of Home; and as the canoe glided beneath the branches of a spreading plantain, a number of large birds, with gorgeous blue bodies, crimson pinions, and tufted heads, sportively pursued one another among the foliage, boo-hooing, braying, shrieking uproariously.

"What's that noisy fowl?" asked Tom, interrupting Mbutu as he was regaling the crew for the tenth time with the moving story of his uncle and the crocodile.

"Dat, sah? Dat big plantain-eater, sah. Berrah brave bird, sah! Him come see me in hut; see uncle, sah, all alone row up ribber. Uncle go sleep, sah; leg ober side--"

At this moment the crew, deprived of their recent amusement, struck up again--

Nsologumba kanpitepite kunyanja
Nsologumba oluilaita kunyanja.

"Couldn't you tell them another story?" suggested Tom.

With a glance in which Tom detected a shade of reproach, the boy resumed his narrative, and kept the crew engrossed until his master called "easy all" for dinner.

Running the canoe up a narrow creek, the men sprang on shore with their axes, and returned by and by bearing with them a huge bunch of ripe bananas, culled from a river-side plantation. These, with some of the biscuits which the padre had thoughtfully packed among his baggage, and a draught of not very palatable water lapped up from the river, Tom found quite sufficient to stay his hunger and thirst. The crew diversified their meal with ground-nuts and a stuff that looked like moist almond-rock, which they took out of a wrapping of leaves. One of them offered Mbutu a small hunk, and he broke off about a fourth part of it, handing the rest to Tom.

"Not to-day, thanks! What is it, may I ask?"

"Berrah nice, sah! Cheese, sah!"

"Really! And what is it made of? Not milk, judging by the look of it."

"Mango, sah! Chop mango stone; take out all inside; knock him about, sah; make cheese. Berrah nice, sah!"

"Well, eat it up, and then we'll be off again. Tell the men I'm pleased with them, and hope they'll do as well all day."

On the way back to the canoe, Tom happened to tread on a pair of large ants crawling on the grass. He was almost overcome by the stench from their crushed bodies. Then every exposed part of his body was stung by mosquitoes, and his head became enveloped in a swarm of yellowish gnats, which Mbutu called kungu-flies.

"Berrah nice, sah!" he said, as they got into the canoe. "Black man catch kungu, sah! Mash, mash, all one cake. Make little fire; fry cake; eat all up."

Tom ruefully thought of his small stock of biscuits, and in this alternative diet recognized an additional motive for pressing on.

It was a broiling hot afternoon, and as the canoe sped on its way Tom saw scores of crocodiles lying on the bank half out of the water, basking in the sunlight, and digesting their food, their eyelids drowsily drooping, their jaws wide open in a sort of prolonged yawn. Just above one of these dozing reptiles, a number of storks and cranes and herons stood perched on one leg, regarding the crocodile, Tom fancied, with a contemplative air, more in sorrow than in anger. Farther on, he was amused to see a young elephant twining its trunk about the neck of a graceful zebra, as in an affectionate embrace. All the afternoon, indeed, he was kept interested by an ever-changing panorama, eye and ear being alike captivated incessantly by something new and strange. He was naturally observant, and many curious details impressed themselves upon his mind without his being conscious of them. He would have liked to stay and study this new world at his leisure, but the temptation to linger was counteracted by his sense of the urgency of his mission. The only other drawback to his enjoyment was the pain caused by the mosquito bites, which increased as the day wore on.

At sundown, having covered some twenty-two miles, and made, as Tom considered, very satisfactory progress for the day, he ordered the men to run the canoe up a creek that promised well as a halting-place. After a good supper, they went on shore to find sleeping quarters for themselves, and in a very short time ran up a wattled hut, and built fires round it to keep off lions and other undesirable visitors. Tom wrapt himself in a rug, gave another to Mbutu, and settled himself to sleep in the stern of the canoe. He was kept awake for some time by the bright moonlight, the splashes of fish, quaint creakings and groanings from the trees, the grunt of rhinoceroses, the strange whine and sighing cough of crocodiles, and the

inevitable howl of jackals. He fell asleep at last.

Mbutu, meanwhile, sat in the bows, dreamily watching the shimmer of the moonbeams on the water, and pondering on his wonderful luck in the change of masters. He was just dozing off to sleep when he noticed a dark form edging along the bank. A swift glance showed him that it was a crocodile, leaving on its nightly prowl for food. It slid noiselessly into the water, and, thinking that the beast was making for the opposite bank, Mbutu paid no further attention to it. But suddenly he became aware of a small dark object approaching the canoe. There was not a sound nor even a ripple on the water; but one glance was enough to a boy born and bred as Mbutu had been in the African wilds. It was the snout of the crocodile! At the same moment he observed with horror that his master, restless in his sleep, had thrown one arm over the side of the canoe, and that the hideous jaws of the reptile were within a few feet of snapping distance. Quick as thought he stooped, clutched at the rope mooring the canoe to a small overhanging acacia, and pulled with all his strength. The canoe lurched forward, striking heavily against the bulging root of the tree,--and Tom awoke with a start, to see Mbutu smite the crocodile savagely over the head with a paddle.

"What is it?" he said sleepily.

"Sah nearly gobble up. Croc'dile berrah hungry. Arm berrah nice; soon all gone, sah."

Tom shivered.

"You're a brick, Mbutu," he said, "and your head's screwed on right. But for you!--ugh! it's horrid to think of!"

"Uncle, sah--" began Mbutu.

"Yes, yes; tell me all about him another time. Call up the crew. They must take turns at watching; and tell them to do it thoroughly."

No further hazards marred Tom's rest. In the morning, while Mbutu was preparing their simple breakfast, Tom strolled up the reddish hillside above the river to survey his surroundings, carrying the field-glass presented to him by Father Chevasse. At this spot the larger trees were absent, and the country around was for the most part flat and marshy, the dark-green broken here and there by patches of gaudy blossom and red clay soil. The hill commanded a view of the river for some two or three miles, but Tom could see little but reeds, the stream itself, indeed, being scarcely perceptible as it wound in and out among the aquatic vegetation. Some distance, however, in the direction from which the canoe had come, there was a stretch of about a quarter of a mile of clear water, looking like a blue lake amid the green, and on this Tom's eye rested. Suddenly he saw a cloud rise up from the water, which he instantly judged to be a huge flock of waterfowl. Then a dark object appeared, slowly crossing the surface of the patch of blue towards him.

"Some hippo out catching the early worm," said Tom to himself, smiling afterwards as the inaptness of the phrase struck him. He raised the glass to his eyes. "No, it's not a hippo; it's a canoe! By Jove! what if it's the dago!"

While he was still gazing at it, the canoe came within the circle of papyrus, and disappeared from view. Seeing another clear stretch on the near side of this clump of reeds, Tom called to Mbutu to run up the hill. It was important to know whether they were indeed pursued. Not that Tom was alarmed--he felt himself a match on even terms for any Portuguese,--but he preferred not to be taken by surprise, whatever happened. The canoe emerged from the reeds just as Mbutu reached the top of the hill. He looked in the direction Tom pointed, and with his naked eye at once descried the canoe. The next moment he declared excitedly:

"Dago man in canoe!"

"Bosh!" said Tom, to test him. "You have dago on the brain, I'm afraid."

"White man all say bosh!" returned the boy. "No bosh! no bosh! Dago man in canoe all same!"

Again the canoe vanished, and both observers watched tensely for its reappearance. Twenty minutes elapsed; then it glided into view again. It was now no more than a mile away.

"Sah, see!" cried Mbutu. "Dago sure nuff."

"You are right, Mbutu. We are being followed. We needn't get flustered, but we must start at once, and eat our breakfast as we go."

Hurrying down the hill, he ordered the crew on board, and loosed the rope. In another minute the canoe was bounding like a racer rapidly up-stream.

"The dago has not yet seen us, at any rate," said Tom, "and we may get clear away without being observed at all if the men put their backs into it."

"No, sah! Birds fly up; tell dago canoe in front. Dago know all same."

"Then it's a question of speed, eh? Well, we've the lighter canoe; crew four and passengers two. He has the heavier canoe; crew eight and passenger one. We shall get through where he would stick in the mud; though the water seems to have a fair depth here, worse luck. Well, Mbutu, we're not going to be overhauled; tell the men there's kiboko after them; that'll make them hurry."

The crew paddled away swiftly, and began to sing. Tom was relieved to find that words and tune were changed at last, but after a few bars he peremptorily stopped them.

"The dago will hear them," he said, "and it will be just as well for us not to let him know our whereabouts. Tell them another story, Mbutu."

Tom sat rigidly in the stern, wondering how the Portuguese had got on their track. The course of events since he had been turned back by Tom's crew twenty-four hours before was as follows. He had paddled down-stream till he reached the place where Tom had embarked, and then sent one of his men to the village to

find out what was going on there. The man returned, bringing the news that the white man had left. Furious at being so easily outwitted, the Portuguese had then gone up himself, seized the first negro he came upon, and demanded information about Tom's route. This the negro, obeying the instructions of his chief, given to the whole village, at first refused; whereupon the Portuguese tied him to a tree and thrashed him till the poor wretch, in sheer desperation, told all he knew. Without wasting another moment the Portuguese started in pursuit, enraged at having lost five hours through so simple a trick. Pressing his men, he arrived within five miles of Tom before dark, and starting again before sunrise, he had by seven o'clock crept up to within a mile of his quarry, as Tom had fortunately discovered.

Tom knew nothing of all this, except that the Portuguese was close on his heels. As his crew bent themselves to their task, he sat reviewing the situation. He had this advantage over the Portuguese, that, having seen the pursuer while himself unseen, he could ply his men with a stronger, because more actual, incentive to speed. But he had no idea how much farther they had yet to paddle before they reached Lake Mazingo, and though two of the natives had performed the journey before, their ideas of distance were vague. If many miles remained to be covered, and the chase resolved itself into a prolonged race, Tom saw clearly enough that the Portuguese was bound to win, for, having the larger crew, he could divide his men into relays. Given even chances, then, Tom recognized the impossibility of outdistancing the pursuer.

There remained two alternative courses: either to beach the canoe at once and take to the woods, or to attempt some ruse. A moment's reflection showed him that the first was unwise, for it would mean finding a way laboriously through unknown forest, necessarily at a slow pace, and the result might be that before he could overtake the expedition the mischief would be done. As to the second alternative, Tom racked his brains for a trick likely to succeed in throwing the Portuguese off the scent; but the only thing that suggested itself was to run his canoe up some deep creek, and remain in hiding there until the larger canoe had passed and might be deemed out of harm's way. On second thoughts Tom gave this up also. Failure to sight the canoe he was chasing, and the sudden cessation of disturbance among the water-fowl ahead, might arouse suspicion in the pursuer's mind, and provoke him to search the creeks; and even supposing it did not, Tom's own progress after the larger canoe had gone by would have to be regulated so cautiously that in this case also precious time would be lost. Reviewing all these points, Tom came to the conclusion that his best plan was to hold on as he was going as long as he could, and then trust to the accidents of the chase to make his way clear.

On they went, then, for mile after mile. The sun was now high, and the

willing negroes were panting and perspiring freely. Mbutu in the bows kept a sharp eye on the winding river behind, but so far had not caught so much as a glimpse of the pursuing craft. About ten o'clock, when the crew were patently flagging, the head-man spoke rapidly to Mbutu, dropping his paddle for a moment, and pointing eagerly ahead.

"What does he say?" asked Tom, observing this.

"Him say ribber make bow, sah," said Mbutu, describing an arc in the air. "Ribber go round hill; way ober hill soon, much soon. Canoe stop, master walk ober."

Tom was at first somewhat perplexed at this vague statement, but by questioning the men he learnt that the canoe was approaching a great bend in the river, which wound about the base of a hill some two hundred feet high, thickly covered with scrub. The distance round the hill by the river was about a mile and a half, while overland across the hill it was little more than three-quarters of a mile. Mbutu explained this by comparing the curving stream to a bent bow, and the hill path to the bow-string. Tom at once saw that if the Portuguese were close on their heels, and chanced to know of the short cut, he might disembark half his crew, cross the hill, and possibly arrive at the farther end of the arc before Tom's canoe. In any case, if he were armed, as the natives had declared, there was little chance of escaping with a whole skin, or even of escaping at all.

Tom did not take long to make up his mind what to do. The canoe was already approaching the bend, and he saw the hill looming up to the right, covered with purple and dark-green scrub.

"Mbutu," he said, "you take the head-man's paddle. He and I will go across the hill and watch for the enemy. The rest of you will paddle with all your might round the bend, and wait for me at the other end of it. I shall then know exactly what we have to expect."

"All right, sah!" returned Mbutu. "Me paddle well too much."

The men cleverly ran the canoe alongside a moss-covered rock, and Tom sprang out, followed by the man who had given the information. Tired as he was, the native started to run at Tom's bidding, and picked his way deftly through what from the riverside looked impenetrable scrub, Tom sprinting behind with never a pause till they reached the top. There they stooped behind a low, dense bush, and scanned the horizon. From this point of vantage the whole of the shining river could be seen, save where a knoll or bluff intercepted portions of it. Tom looked eagerly in the direction whence he had come. Not more than a minute after he had reached the hill-top the nose of the long canoe shot into sight. Tom scanned it through his field-glass. The crew were going strong, but there was nothing to show whether the Portuguese had sighted the fleeing canoe. Tom was relieved to see that he had increased his lead slightly since the morning. On came the graceful

craft; four minutes passed, and the silent watchers saw that it was making for the bank.

"The dago, or one of his men, knows of this short cut, then," said Tom to himself. "I wonder if we left any footprints on the rock."

But the canoe grounded some distance on the farther side of Tom's landing-place. The Portuguese jumped ashore, followed by four of his crew, all armed with rifles. They began the ascent, not so nimbly as Tom and his companion, and without discovering any traces of earlier pedestrians. Tom gave an anxious glance at the river. His canoe was still a quarter of a mile from the spot which he had already marked for rejoining it. The other canoe was rounding the bend, going rather less rapidly. A glance to the left showed him the Portuguese and his men advancing steadily through the scrub. It was time to be off. Signing to his man to lead the way, Tom plunged after him downhill. It was even rougher going than on the other side. Scrambling here and sliding there, at the imminent risk of breaking his neck, or at least spraining an ankle, Tom pelted along after his nimble guide, and arrived breathless at the water's edge, his clothes torn and his hands scratched by the scrub and thorn. His canoe arrived a few moments later, and, wading quickly through the shallows, Tom and the Muganda clambered on board.

At that instant the still air was cleft by two sharp cracks, and two bullets whizzed past, dropping harmlessly into the water. Tom looked up and saw the Portuguese, clearly in a wild state of excitement, pounding down the hill with his four negroes. Tom's crew, exultant at having so successfully escaped, raised their lusty voices in the war-chant of their tribe, hurling defiance at the baffled pursuers. Tom sternly bade them cease, pointing to the quarter of a mile of clear water which they had still to traverse before they reached the shelter of a new clump of reeds. Again came the crack! crack! of rifles, but the Portuguese and his men were out of breath, and their fire was wild. One bullet hit the side of the canoe. A splinter flew up, striking one of the crew in the fleshy forearm and making a nasty gash. In a moment Tom tore a strip from one of his bundles of calico, and, recalling his experience of ambulance work in the cadet corps at school, swiftly bound up the wound. He then ordered Mbutu to take the wounded man's paddle, and turned to watch the doings of the enemy.

But he was already out of sight. The larger canoe, now hidden by the reeds, had just reached the horn of the curve, where the Portuguese was awaiting it. He was in a towering passion, and heaped unmeasured abuse on his luckless crew for failing to overtake their expected prey. By the time he and his men were afloat again, Tom's canoe was fully a mile and a half in advance, and out of sight.

It was now past mid-day. The heat was terrible, and there had been no time for a meal since starting. Tom had nibbled a few biscuits and drunk a little water,

and his crew had munched some of their ground-nuts and cheese, relieving each other in pairs for a few minutes at a time. Tom did not dare to allow them to stop paddling altogether, for the pursuing crew could divide into larger relays, and he guessed that, having once sighted him, the Portuguese would give his men no respite until they overtook him. He wondered how long his own men's marvellous staying-power would hold out. Watching them anxiously, he saw with concern that, as the afternoon wore on, their strokes became less certain and put less and less way on the canoe. Mbutu, willing lad, relieved the others in turn at intervals, but, though he had said that he could "paddle well too much", it was obvious that he was out of training, as well as muscularly less hardy than the stalwart negroes.

About five o'clock Mbutu, again in his old place in the bow, cried suddenly: "Dago man come close!"

Tom glanced round. The larger canoe was no more than three-quarters of a mile behind, and its crew gave a whoop of delight when they saw how they had gained on the other. The Portuguese stood up in the stern, and, raising his rifle to his shoulder, fired. Mbutu instinctively ducked, and it was well he did so, for the bullet flew by within an inch of his head and plumped into the water a few yards beyond. Tom's canoe then rounded a bend, and once more the pursuers were lost to view.

Half an hour later the two vessels were again in sight of each other, and now were scarcely half a mile apart. Another shot came whizzing through the air, and passed between the two Baganda nearest Mbutu. They gave a slight shudder as they heard its weird ping, and bent frantically to their paddles. Tom's mouth was set, and there came into his blue eyes the steely expression which had always given his school-fellows a feeling of expectancy and apprehension. He did not think of himself. He thought only of his uncle and the Portuguese, of how for his uncle's sake he must by hook or by crook evade the clutches of the conspirator behind. His feeling towards the pursuer was curiously impersonal, the same kind of feeling that he would have had towards a bowler at cricket--a skilled player to keep his eye on and beat if he could. He saw that but for some unforeseen accident he would be compelled to take to the woods within a very few minutes, and then, though he was resolved not to be captured, he would give little for his chances of reaching the expedition in time.

At this critical moment his eye lit on a tree overhanging the river, which had here narrowed to little more than a gorge between steep banks. It was light in the trunk, but very thick in foliage. A second glance showed him that the roots, protruding from loose red soil, were almost bare, and he instantly inferred that a recent storm, and probably the flooding of the river, had shaken their hold. A third glance as the canoe brought him nearer made it plain that, but for a rope-work of climbing plants which had woven itself about the trunk, the tree would

have already fallen across the stream.

Tom saw here a bare chance of escape, and, with characteristic readiness to seize the merest semblance of an opportunity, he prepared to make the most of it. As the canoe shot along beneath the overhanging branches, he marked a small rivulet that cut a way through the bank just beyond the tree. In a ringing voice, careless now whether his pursuer heard him or not, he ordered the men to run the canoe ashore, then to follow him up the narrow watercourse with their axes. In half a minute he had swarmed up the bank; in another half the men's keen axes had torn away the climbing-plant supports. His men threw themselves *en masse* upon the trunk, and just as the enemy's canoe came within two hundred paces, the tree fell with a loud crash, and lay across from bank to bank, completely blocking the waterway with its tangle of boughs and leaves. Springing down the bank again, Tom and his panting crew jumped into the canoe, and were three hundred yards up-stream and nearly out of sight before the Portuguese had realized the impossibility of continuing the chase on the water. He wasted some minutes in a vain attempt to drag his craft over the obstruction, and a few more in flinging curses after Tom and firing at random over the tree; then he landed with his crew, and began to chase his quarry along the shore. But before he had run a quarter of a mile he found himself up to his knees in ooze, and, after floundering helplessly about for a time, he fired one vindictive shot and relinquished the pursuit.

Not till then did Tom allow his crew to relax their efforts.

"Easy all; you have done well!" he cried.

They shipped their paddles gladly. They were gasping for breath; the sinews of their arms stood out like whip-cord, and their streaming faces had taken on the livid hue that is the only paleness a black knows. Tom himself, after the tension of the last hour, felt limp and unstrung, and it was with a sigh of thankfulness that he heard Mbutu, interpreting one of the natives, inform him that the marshy flats at which they had arrived formed the eastern extremity of Lake Mazingo. The sun was just setting, and in the fast-gathering darkness he could descry the gigantic forms of hippopotamuses and rhinoceroses taking their evening bath in the mud.

Feeling assured that the surrounding swamp would effectually protect him from any nocturnal surprise on the part of the Portuguese, Tom gave orders to the men to make as good a meal as they could, and then to sleep in the canoe, taking turns to watch. For himself, he stayed his hunger with a few bananas that Mbutu had put aside for him, some biscuits, and a cake of unleavened millet produced by his thoughtful henchman. He examined the wounded man's arm, and gave it a fresh dressing; then, worn out by the anxieties and excitements of the day, he

wrapped himself in his rug, gazed up at the benignant stars, and fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER V

A Long March

Lake Mazingo--Tom's Talisman--Scenes on the March--In Sight--Tom Surprises the Doctor--Imubinga

Tom woke with the dawn, feeling anything but well. His head was aching violently; he was reluctant to move; and when at last he threw off his rug and raised himself on his elbow, his head swam and he shivered. A clammy mist lay thick upon the surface of the lake, completely hiding everything beyond a radius of a dozen yards. The water smelt abominably, reminding Tom so strongly of the Clyde at its worst that he said to himself: "I declare I am homesick!" and laughed at the new application of the word.

"It looks very much," he thought, "as though I'm in for a spell of fever. But I simply can't afford time to be ill. Wish this wretched mist would clear away, so that I could see whereabouts we are."

At this moment Mbutu came up from the other end of the canoe. He held out a small paper packet to his master, who took it and opened it before his dazed recollection was fully awake.

"Ah! cinchona, that blessed bark!" he exclaimed, when he saw the white powder. "I remember the padre gave us some to put among our baggage. Thanks, Mbutu! you're a clever fellow to guess so readily what is wrong with me. Well, here goes; out of the bitter" (he swallowed the drug) "shall come forth the sweet, and let's hope I'll soon be as strong as Samson himself. And look! there's the sun struggling through this detestable wet blanket. The mist will soon be gone, and then we must make a start."

"Berrah well, sah," said Mbutu. "Me sleepy too much, sah."

"Sleepy, are you? How's that? I slept as sound as that fellow--what was his name?--who snored for a hundred years. What!" (as an idea struck him) "you don't mean to say you've been watching all night?"

"Oh yes, sah! Sah berrah sleepy; dem black man no good; me tink about croc'dile. Uncle, sah, go by-by in canoe all same too much; leg trickle ober side, sah; croc'dile berrah hungry; come 'long, 'long; no nize, sah; him--"

Mbutu's only story was interrupted at this point by a howl from one of the

crew. Expecting to see at least a leg or an arm less among them, Tom started up. What he actually saw was the howling native lying face upwards at full length along the bottom of the canoe, and his three mates walking solemnly over him, kneading him with their feet, a look of solemn determination imprinted on their features. What most astonished Tom was that, though the prostrate man still yelled, he appeared to like the performance, and rolled his eyes gratefully at his perambulating friends.

"What--what on earth are they doing?" laughed Tom.

"Him sick too much in tummick, sah," said Mbutu gravely. "Too much cheese, sah. Better next time soon."

"Is that their cure for dyspepsia, then? I must tell Dr. Corney about this. What a fine poster it would make for advertising somebody's pills! As the howls have stopped, I suppose the poor fellow is better?"

"Berrah well now, sah. Him no eat cheese not much no more. Cheese too much nice."

Tom laughed. The sun was rapidly dispersing the mist, which rolled back like a circular curtain. The surface of the lake was clear for half a mile round, though clear was after all not the word for it, papyrus sticking up thickly in all directions. Tom felt again rather depressed as he scanned the dismal prospect, but did his best to shake off the weight. Unable to eat anything himself, he ordered his men to have their breakfast and prepare to start.

The whole of that day was occupied in paddling down the lake. Tom could hardly endure the slowness of their progress. The crew would paddle for half a mile, then find the canoe entangled in a maze of subaqueous creepers, and have to try back for twenty yards or so and look for another passage. Once, going at a fair pace, it embedded itself in a submerged bank of black mud, and all its occupants had to jump overboard, and partly by heaving, partly by loosening the mud with the axes, free the craft from the obstruction. Then, as the afternoon wore on, mosquitoes and ticks innumerable buzzed about their heads. The natives paid little heed to these importunate visitors, but Tom's face, neck, and arms were stung in scores of places, and he suffered almost intolerable torture. He found some mental relief in opening on his knees the writing-case given him by Mr. Barkworth, and penning an account of his adventures, intending to send the letter by one of the crew on their return journey. In course of time they came opposite a small native village on the lake-side, and Mbutu, with Tom's permission, leapt overboard and waded to the shore. He returned in about half an hour carrying a closely-woven straw basket, which he handed to Tom.

"Drink, sah, fust; berrah well. Next time, rub hands and face, so; berrah well. Berrah nice, sah; hurt all go too soon."

Tom saw that the basket was half-full of delicious new milk. He drank more

gratefully than ever in his life before, then washed his face and arms in what was left.

About five o'clock they reached a point which the natives declared was the southern extremity of the lake, and beyond which they had been forbidden by their chief to go. Tom heaved a sigh of relief.

"There is an hour before sundown," he said. "We ought to be able to find a native hut or two by that time--eh, Mbutu?"

"Sure nuff, sah."

"The first thing is to get ashore. The water is not deep enough for us to pull in, and the bottom seems nothing but mud."

"All same, sah; me know all 'bout it, sah."

Fixing his keen eyes on the water around, Mbutu picked out the direction in which the depth of water was greatest and the reeds thinnest, and under his guidance the Baganda gently paddled the canoe to within thirty yards of the shore.

"Stop dis place," he said at last. "Sah say by-by to black man; black man go home now; home to pickin."

Tom got out his rolls of calico and packets of beads, and gravely cut off from the one and counted out from the other the stipulated quantities, which he handed to the crew, adding a present to each, and an extra douceur to the head-man and the poor fellow injured the day before. He then made them a speech, thanking them in the King's name for the service they had done the British Empire in general and Major John Burnaby in particular, Mbutu translating very freely, and at considerable length, into the vernacular. Finally he handed his letter to the head-man, telling him that Mr. Barkworth would give him a handsome present when he delivered it. Then he went over the side, Mbutu following with the baggage.

It was past six o'clock, and almost without warning the sun sank down upon their right, and everything was dark. Mbutu led the way over the swampy soil, his master following gingerly at the distance of about a yard, just able to discern his black form. After ten minutes' walking they felt the ground gradually becoming drier, and half an hour later they found themselves treading a turf that reminded Tom of the Berkshire downs. He asked Mbutu what plan he had formed. The boy replied that he had none, except to find a village where they might rest in safety for the night. He added that he was beginning to be afraid of snakes, and hinted that a lion or two might happen to be prowling abroad.

"Me want see light, sah," he said.

At length, after they had been walking for an hour and a half, he gleefully exclaimed that he saw a twinkle ahead. Fifteen minutes later the pedestrians came to a sort of guard-house gateway, built of mud and wattles, across a narrow path. They passed through it, and found themselves in the single street of a village lined with grass huts on each side, one of these, somewhat larger than the rest,

having a fire in it, the glow of which Mbutu had seen through the door-hole. The inhabitants appeared to be asleep; there was no sound save the faint baa of a goat in the compound beyond, and the melancholy night moo of a cow. Signing to his master to stop, Mbutu put down his little load, found a strip of calico and a bracelet of beads, and uttered a curious cry, between the call of a hyena and the howl of a wolf. In an instant, as it seemed, the two strangers were surrounded by a ring of natives, who in their haste had snatched up as weapons whatever came first to hand. Torches were soon on the scene, and by their light the amazed natives saw the disturbers of their repose: a tall white man, nearly six feet high, young, broad-shouldered, with thin, hairless face--thinned even by the anxieties of the last few days,--keen blue eyes, and firm lips; and a Muhima, some eight inches shorter than his master, his thick lips and woolly hair proclaiming his negro blood, but his eyes and brow and arched nose bespeaking a strain derived from a far-distant Egyptian ancestry. Englishman and Muhima, each with race marked in every line of his figure, stood facing the wondering villagers unflinchingly.

Then Mbutu began to explain, and Tom stood patiently for an hour while his follower lauded him to the skies, claimed for him qualities and connections of the most exalted nobility, and demanded hospitality from the villagers in the name of the Great White King. They were visibly impressed, and talked away energetically among themselves. Then the chief came forward and said that he knew the servants of the Great White King were good brothers of his; he had seen some of them only the day before; but how was he to be sure that his white visitor was not one of the Wa-daki, whom he hated as he hated snakes and leopards? Tom was at first at a loss how to convince the chief of his British nationality. Suddenly bethinking himself, he took out his pocket-book, in which he had a few postage-stamps. He tore off one, and showed it to the negro. When Mbutu explained that the head on the stamp was the head of the Great White King, the chief was delighted; still more when Tom, wetting it, solemnly affixed it to his black arm. After that the enraptured chief announced that his own hut was freely at the disposition of the white man.

Tom's host was a villainous-looking savage, but he proved most hospitable. His hut contained nothing but a hard plank raised on short pegs from the earthen floor, a broken box, a small fire, and a general supply of insects. Mbutu explained that his master, whom he called his great chief, was tired and wished to sleep, but that first he must have a meal, and would purchase a young fowl. That was instantly forthcoming, and in a few minutes Mbutu had prepared an excellent supper of grilled chicken, unleavened millet-cakes, and tea unsweetened, but qualified with cow's milk.

On the following morning Tom sent Mbutu to summon the chief to a palaver. That solemn function lasted for two hours, and Tom was on thorns till it was over.

The talking was mainly between Mbutu and the chief, and Tom was amazed that so much eloquence had to be expended in giving and receiving so little information. All that he learnt was that the expedition had passed within a couple of miles of the village soon after sunrise on the previous day, and that it was proceeding due west, to punish the Arabs and the Manyema. The chief was very emphatic on this point; he declared that the Arabs and their allies deserved all they would get, for they had made themselves a terror for miles round, treating the natives with frightful cruelty, lopping off hands and feet, slitting noses, killing outright, sometimes in wanton devilry, sometimes as punishment for trivial offences. The expedition had bought a few sheep and goats, and paid for them, but "not nuff", as Mbutu interpreted to his master, adding, however, that no native chief would ever admit himself satisfied: "black chief all same for one".

Tom was delighted to hear that his uncle was only a day's march in front of him. Discovering that the route lay for miles over grass country, gradually rising until it entered a mountainous region, he inferred that the British force would now be moving at a slow rate, which increased his chances of overtaking it soon. With a march overland before him, he felt the advisability of having a weapon of some sort in case of emergency, and asked the chief through Mbutu if he had a rifle to sell. The chief produced a very old and rusty weapon, with some cartridges, and Tom grimaced when, on trying a shot, he found himself thrown backward by the unexpected force of its kick. He accepted it in default of a better, and left Mbutu to settle the price.

It was past ten o'clock when the two travellers, amid the friendly farewells of the whole village, set off on their march. Tom guessed that the expedition, being rather more than twenty-four hours ahead of them, was at this time some twenty-five miles away, and he hoped with good luck to decrease that lead very considerably before nightfall. Mbutu's load, diminished by the quantities of calico and beads already parted with, was now much lighter than when he started, so that, though shorter, he found himself quite able to keep up with Tom, who set off with an easy stride.

After about half an hour's walking, they struck into the track of the expedition. It was a path not more than a foot wide, which in some parts evidently followed a previous native track, in other parts had been trodden for the first time by the advancing force. Tom was surprised to find it so narrow, until informed by Mbutu that in Africa native troops almost invariably kept single file while on the march. The path led over rolling grassy downs, clumps of bracken and bramble here and there giving them a very home-like appearance. In one place, indeed, Tom was delighted to see a few daisies growing; he stooped and picked one, smiling, as he stuck it in his coat, to think of the thousands of daisies he had trampled under foot at home without even a passing thought. Large trees were few and

far between on the savannah, but one, which he had never seen before, seemed to Tom extraordinarily graceful--a long, straight, even stem, with a cluster of strange fronds spreading fan-like from its top.

The path led across streams of clear sparkling water, in which, as the sun grew hotter, Tom was glad to bathe his face and feet, and occasionally to drink. The banks of every stream of considerable size were clothed with luxuriant vegetation, palms, acacias, lianas growing thickly together, with tall grass, wild bananas, and flowering creepers which made a dazzling and beautiful picture. Crimson butterflies darted hither and thither among the foliage. "How Jenks would revel in this on a Saturday afternoon!" thought Tom, and was reminded that he had lost count of the days. He opened his pocket-diary, and by tracing back his recent adventures found that it was Saturday, the 8th of June. "And to-morrow's Uncle Jack's birthday!" he remembered. "Well, I've no present for him--except myself, and I don't suppose" (the thought was accompanied by a rueful smile) "he'll be overglad to see me--at least at first."

He was at this moment entering a patch of forest on the edge of a stream, and Mbutu pointed out some deep scratches on the grayish boles.

"What are they?" asked Tom. "They remind me of the scratches on the legs of the table in my father's study, and our old cat--heavens, how long it seems since I saw them!"

"Leopards did 'em, sah! When dey catch us dey eat us."

"Really! Then they mustn't catch us, that's all."

Just as the words were out of his mouth, a terrific crash to the left made him jump and stand watchfully bent forward with his loaded rifle. He peered into the dense mass of foliage, but saw nothing.

"No leopard, sah; leopard no make nize."

"What is it, then?"

"Dere he are, sah! Dat him! Big amalua, sah!"

They had just reached the water's edge. Away to the left, sousing himself in the running stream, they saw a splendid elephant, with gleaming tusks that would have brought joy to a hunter's soul. Tom would have tried a shot, if he had not already proved that his rifle was hopelessly antiquated and short-ranged, and with his present responsibility he did not feel justified in running any avoidable risks. He sighed, and passed on, over a bridge of tree-trunks cleverly bound together by ropes made of papyrus and creepers. It had evidently been slightly repaired for the passage of the British force, some of the plant-ropes looking fresh and new.

On the other side of the stream came another stretch of fairly level country, with short, straw-coloured grass, interrupted here and there by a swamp. By half-past five Tom calculated that they had covered no more than twenty miles, and he was uncomfortably conscious of his want of training. He had a drawn,

burning sensation at the ball of his left foot, and felt pretty sure that he would find there the making of a blister. Luckily, just before sundown they came to a banana plantation, amid which, on a knoll, stood a very neat and tidy-looking hut. It happened to be empty, and Tom thought it no wrong to the absent owner to make it his quarters for the night. There were a few rough clay utensils in it, and Mbutu, fetching water from the brook which ran round the base of the knoll, soon made some tea, which, with bananas cut fresh, millet cakes, and oatmeal biscuits, furnished a satisfactory supper. Tom bathed his feet, and at Mbutu's suggestion covered them with a compress of bananas. In the morning he found, rather to his surprise, that this novel application had been most beneficial. It was only one of the hundred uses to which, as he learnt by degrees afterwards, the natives put the plant: its pulp made flour and beer, spirits and soap; its rind made plates and dishes and napkins; while its stalks provided pipes, and even material for footbridges.

Next day they started at sunrise. Walking was more arduous than it had been on the previous day, for the ground rose gradually, becoming more and more rocky, cut at intervals by ravines, and showing here and there fragments of what Tom believed must be lava. The soil was in truth volcanic; not very many miles to the south of their path stood two volcanoes still moderately active, and but a few miles north there were mountain lakes lying hidden in the craters of volcanoes long extinct. Tom knew nothing of these, however; he was only concerned with the hard fact that walking was unpleasant, and that over the rocky ground the track of the expedition was sometimes difficult to discover. The one consolation was that, slow as their own progress was, the progress of the expedition, as the Zanzibari porters carried their loads over ravine and boulder, must necessarily be slower. Foot-sore, aching in every limb, he nevertheless pressed on indomitably, hoping against hope that he might overtake his uncle before night. But though he anxiously looked ahead through his field-glass, he saw nothing but broken, rocky country, and at five miles' distance his view was interrupted altogether by a rugged line of hills.

The sun went down in crimson splendour. There was no hut on this occasion to afford sleeping room to the weary travellers. Building a fire with some wood from a scanty copse on the bank of a ravine, they found a shelter hard by among the rocks, and slept in their rugs. Up again at day-break, they pushed on, and were pleased to find, on reaching the range of hills before mentioned, that the ground there sloped gradually downwards, and the path led once more into a grassy plain. Just before noon, after crossing a bridge, evidently new, thrown over a wider stream than any they had yet encountered, and walking up a steep grassy acclivity, Tom raised his glass to his eyes, and uttered an exclamation of thankfulness and joy.

"There they are, Mbutu!" he cried. "I see them! It must be the expedition. It's just like a long snake winding through a broad defile over there. Look! Now isn't it?"

Mbutu peered long and earnestly into the distance.

"Right, sah! I see dem big black man. Dey plenty big, plenty strong. Soon be dar, sah; see sah him uncle."

Tom stopped short.

"Look here, Mbutu," he said, "an idea has just struck me. You mustn't be seen at first. If that scamp of a guide sees you, he will suspect something, and our long journey may be thrown away. I must go on first. He doesn't know me."

"Berrah well, sah; all same for one."

"You're not afraid, are you? I shouldn't like a wild animal to run off with my katikiro."

Mbutu grinned.

"No 'fraid dis time, sah. Sah him uncle drive all wild beast away; all dat nize, sah; wild beast no like nize; make him tummick bad too much, sah."

"Well, I needn't leave you yet. They're still about five miles ahead, I should think, and they're almost over the hill-top now. When we get within sight of the rear-guard again, I'll go on, and you must keep in touch till you're sent for."

Tom's feet by this time were giving him torture. He felt horribly fagged, and, realizing how hungry he was, he sighed, above all things in the world, for a juicy steak and a jug of shandy-gaff, such as used to await the school fifteen after a hard house match. "But I'm not going to give in at the death," he said to himself doggedly. "And I should think another couple of hours would do it."

He crossed the hill, and saw the tail-end of the force not more than two miles ahead, just passing into a clump of trees, on the near side of which were two or three native huts.

"That's where you must stay, Mbutu. It's about four o'clock now, so the force will be camping very soon, and we shan't be far ahead of you. Now, I'm going on. Good-bye for the present; I fancy you'll see me again after dark."

"All right, sah; so long!" The slang sounded strange in the mouth of a Muhima, and Tom's lips twitched with amusement as he turned his back.

Forty minutes later, as he was walking as fast as his sore feet allowed through a stretch of thin forest, he was halted by the bayonet of a Soudanese sergeant, who looked at him with amazement.

"All right, sergeant; I'm Major Burnaby's nephew. You can let me through."

The Soudanese happened to be one of the draft picked up at Entebbe, and thus had not seen Tom before. He seemed too much surprised to think. The stranger was unmistakeably an Englishman, however, and he could not be going very far wrong if he sent him under guard to the major. Calling two of his men,

he instructed them to lead Tom between them to the commanding officer, who was superintending the formation of a camp about a mile ahead.

Tom limped along, feeling now too much excited, as well as exhausted, to attempt any conversation with his escort. Two minutes after leaving the sergeant, he heard a familiar voice before him.

"There now, more comfortable now, aren't ye? Just take care you don't go putting your foot on a thorn again. Bedad, it's you scoundhrels of porters that get more out of the R.A.M.C. than the soldiers at all, at all. Now just be after minding your toes, ye spalpeen."

Dr. Corney O'Brien had just extracted a thorn from a Zanzibari's foot, when he looked up and caught sight of Tom.

"By all the holy powers!" he exclaimed. "It's you!"

"Yes--it's myself, doctor," said Tom, with a feeble attempt to smile.

"'Pon my soul, I thought it was your ghost!" gasped the doctor. "Ah, faith, won't the major be pleased! I wouldn't be in your shoes for-- But, save us, the lad's dead-beat."

Excitement even more than fatigue had overcome Tom's nerve at last; but for the support of the two Soudanese he would have fallen. Quick as thought the little doctor whipped out a flask and poured a few drops of brandy between his lips.

"Now you fellows," he called to the Soudanese, "just rig up a litter. Come, look alive! Half a minute by my watch, no more!"

The stalwart soldiers, in less than the time specified, had improvised a litter out of their rifles and a couple of coats.

"Now, my dear bhoy, we will hear Ould Blazes' remarks in ten minutes. Gently, now."

"But, Doctor, really I can't go into camp in a litter," said Tom, whose fainting fit had lasted but a few seconds.

"Can't ye, bedad? You can't go any other way, nor you shan't if you can. Sure an' you're as thin's a lath; no wonder the leopards and lions and all the other wild cratures let ye through! No, ye're not to talk at all; I'll do the talking; just lie quiet and ride into camp in state. Ah, but the major's face'll be a sight to see--bedad it will! I wouldn't miss it for wurrulds."

He had assisted Tom gently into the litter slung between the two stolid Soudanese; and thus, with a sense of peace and comfort for all his weariness, the wanderer was ushered into the presence of his uncle.

"Hullo, Corney!" shouted the major, as he caught sight of the litter, his jolly voice sounding the very keynote of cheerfulness, and sending a thrill through Tom's soul. "Hullo, Corney! another of your pet malingerers, eh?"

"Not this time. This fellow--would ye believe it?--won't admit there's any-

thing wrong with 'm. Better prepare for a shock, old man. I've not asked 'm yet what 'tis that's brought 'm here, but--

"Good heavens, it's Tom!" cried the major in amazement, which speedily blazed into wrath. "Well, of all the confounded, impudent, disob--"

"Hould yer whisht!" interrupted the doctor. "Do ye not see the lad's dead-beat entirely! The blazes 'll keep. Really, Major, there's something at the bottom of this, or he would not be here. He needs some food first thing; you've got your tent up, I see. Well then, I'll get Saladin to make some Liebig, and when I've had my innings with the bhoy--well, blaze away if you must."

The major said no more. His tent was pitched in the centre of a thorn zariba a hundred and twenty yards square, and the men were busily engaged in running up grass huts and entrenching the camp. Tom was carried to the tent, where in a very short time the energetic little doctor had a steaming bowl of beef-tea, some substantial biscuits, and a bottle of burgundy ready for him. He ought, after his meal, said the doctor, to go to sleep, but Tom declared he could not rest until he had explained his presence, and the doctor gave way, being indeed not a little curious to hear Tom's story. He therefore fetched the major, who was indefatigable in his personal superintendence of the camping arrangements, and, with a private hint to him not to be peppery, brought him into the tent.

They listened attentively as Tom told how Mbutu had come to him on the night of the starting of the expedition, and, on learning that Tom was the major's nephew, had reported the conversation he had overheard; and how he had come with the boy on the padre's launch to the mouth of the Ruezi, and thence by canoe and overland. The major was at first inclined to pooh-pooh the story altogether, but when the doctor pointed out that unless there was some truth in it, the Portuguese would have had no object in pursuing Tom so hotly, he looked grave, and tugged at the ends of his moustache.

"But he had other grounds for annoyance. Nobody likes to be knocked down--and certainly not a Portuguese. But where's that boy of yours, by the by? I will see him myself."

"I told him to wait a couple of miles out, so as not to be seen by your guide," replied Tom.

"Quite right; but it's dark now. I'll send a couple of men to bring him in. We must see how this remarkable story squares with present circumstances."

The major returned rather more than an hour later. "Hasn't that black boy turned up yet?" he asked.

"Give'm time," answered the doctor. "'Tis two miles out and two miles in, remember."

"Well, he won't be long now. By the way, Tom, what race does he belong to?--Banyoro, Baganda, or what?"

"He's a Bahima," replied Tom.

"Muhima," corrected the major, "Muhima for the individual. His people the Bahima are the aristocrats of the country! They've degenerated through mixing with the negroes, but I've no doubt they really are far-away descendants of the ancient Egyptians. Here he is!" added the major, as Mbutu was pushed into the tent by the orderly. "Well, my boy, don't be afraid of me; I'm your master's uncle. Just come and tell me all about it."

Mbutu told the story in his long-winded stumbling way, the major listening attentively, and helping him when he stuck for a word.

"Well now, did you hear those two men mention any place in the course of their talk?"

Mbutu thought for a moment.

"Imubinga, sah!" he said at last. "I know dat. Imubinga! Oh yes!"

"Imubinga! Corney, that's the place, you remember, where the guide said we should camp to-morrow; the inhabitants are likely to have a good supply of food, he said, and that's a blessing in such a sparsely-populated district. This begins to look more serious. I'll send scouts forward first thing in the morning to see if the guide's information is correct so far as it goes. Imubinga, you remember he told us, is in a plain on the far side of a range of hills, got at through a long defile of six miles or so. If that turns out correct, depend upon it this precious ambush will be laid somewhere about the end of the defile. Ambush, indeed! What do they take me for! Still, you never know; we'll be on the safe side."

"Hungry, boy?" asked the doctor, turning to Mbutu.

"No, sah," replied Mbutu promptly. "Berrah nice chicken in pot, sah. Big black soldier gib some. Oh yes!"

"Well," said the major with a smile, "you'll stay in my tent to-night, and understand you are not to go out without leave. The guide must not see you. Why, Corney, Tom's asleep. Did you doctor his wine, eh?"

"Just the least touch in his second glass. 'Twill do the boy good. Sure 'tis sleep he wants."

"D'you know, Corney, I'm proud of this nephew of mine."

"An' ye ought to be, ye ould martinet."

"You wouldn't have me tell him so to his face, would you? Well now, I'll go and see Lister about the scouts; may as well send Mumford in charge, don't you think? And then I must stop the men's jabber; they'll cackle till two in the morning if I don't."

"Faith, 'tis time I turned in myself. Good-night, Major!"

Major Burnaby arranged with Captain Lister for the despatch of a scouting-party at daybreak under Lieutenant Mumford. Then he made a round of the camp to see that the watch-fires were alight and the sentries properly posted. Finding

that the men had finished their supper, he sternly bade them stop talking and go to sleep. Soon the clacking of nine hundred tongues ceased, and the camp lay all peaceful beneath the rising moon.

CHAPTER VI

Unmasked

Cross Questions--Crooked Answers--The Guide Tells his Story--Rumaliza's Plot--The Coming Fight

It was eight o'clock next morning when Tom opened his eyes and tried to remember where he was. Stretching himself on the narrow camp-bed, the twinge that shot from his calves to his shoulders reminded him of his two days' tramp, and he hoped very sincerely that the force was not to move on at once. Luckily for him his uncle had decided to give the men a rest for a few hours, at any rate until the return of the scouts, who had started at six o'clock. The doctor, coming into the tent soon after nine, insisted on his taking a hot bath, and then spent an hour in massaging him. It was in vain that Tom protested against being coddled.

"Coddled indeed! You've a march and a fight in front of you, and ye'll want the free use of your limbs and all your staying-power, sure."

"A fight!" said Tom eagerly; "d'you think Uncle Jack will let me take part in it, Doctor?"

The doctor smiled grimly.

"I don't know about Uncle Jack, young man, but if you're not in it there will be no fight at all."

Pondering this enigmatical utterance, Tom left the tent by and by and strolled round the camp. Captain Lister met him and greeted him warmly, without a word as to what had brought him, and when he encountered his uncle, who was, as usual, full of activity, yet without a vestige of fussiness, that capital soldier had time to grip his hand and hope he was getting "fit".

The four Europeans were sitting beneath the flap of the tent, eating a late breakfast of roast goat and banana fritters, when Lieutenant Mumford returned with his little body of Soudanese scouts and reported himself. Tom had seen very little of him during the few days he had spent at Kisumu, and then thought he was too dandified and lackadaisical to be of much use on active service. He was therefore somewhat surprised now to hear what a business-like and competent

account the lieutenant gave of his movements. He had penetrated, he said, to within two miles of the hills beyond which lay the objective of the expedition. He had met with no sign of the enemy, Arab or native, but had seen many a proof of their depredations in the ruined huts and blackened fields passed on the way. The native populations, sparse in these regions at any time, seemed now to have been either exterminated or carried into captivity. What the guide had said about the nature of the country, and the difficulty of procuring food, was perfectly true; and the scouts had only turned back when they reached the near end of the defile he had mentioned, Mumford considering it useless to spend time in traversing a perfectly open route.

"Very well," said the major. "You'd better get something to eat now, Mumford."

"There's one thing I ought to mention first. We've brought back a native with us, sir--from Visegwe's country, he said. He told us that his village had been raided by Arabs, and himself carried off as a slave and employed as a porter and general hack. His account of how he escaped is rather tall, but I can only repeat what he said. He was marching with the rest of his gang when a couple of rhinoceroses charged the column, and threw things into such confusion that he found a chance to slip away. He was making his way back home when he met us, so I thought it just as well to bring him along in case he could give us some useful information."

"Quite right, Mumford. Send the fellow here. Tom, I suppose that boy of yours is a bit of a linguist, eh? He may as well do the interpreting."

While Lieutenant Mumford was gone to fetch the native, the major took out his map and spread it out on a space cleared on the folding table.

"Yes, I see," he said; "if this native comes from the Arab quarters beyond the Rutchuru, his road homewards would lie across our line of march. He may be useful to us. A strapping fellow, Corney; look at him."

The negro, a finely proportioned young Ankoli, some twenty-five years of age, came up under a guard of Soudanese, who left him standing before the major. In answer to questions, he repeated the story given by Lieutenant Mumford, with some variations which might have been due to Mbutu's capacity for translation. He added that while hiding in the Wutaka hills, with the Kutchuru spread out before him, he had seen the Arabs cross the river and disappear among the hills to the west, retiring no doubt to the distant stronghold whence they made their raids. The man told his story frankly and ingenuously, and answered the major's questions without hesitation. As he described the atrocities committed by the Arabs, his language and gestures were expressive of intense indignation, and indicated that no vengeance could be too terrible for his oppressors.

"Do you know a place called Imubinga?" asked the major quietly, when the man had finished.

At the word, Tom, who was watching him intently, saw his eyelids droop for the fraction of a second. Imubinga! Yes, he knew it; a deserted village a mile or so on the other side of the hills; a capital camping-place, being sheltered by forests trees and well situated as regards water. The major made a rough plan with bits of biscuit and stalks of grass, and asked the native to show him as well as he could the whereabouts of Imubinga, knowing that the African is very clever in thus constructing picture plans. This done, he marked the place tentatively on his map and dismissed the man.

"Gentlemen," he said, when the negro was out of earshot, "the man is a liar--quite an accomplished one. His masters could hardly have chosen a better man for the job."

The three officers and Tom looked at the major, waiting in silence for the explanation of this discovery. At this moment Mbutu, who had for some time been showing signs of great excitement, broke in impetuously:

"Black man talk bosh! All one lie. Him no slave not at all! Him big awful liar!"

"Your young man has an emphatic way of expressing himself," said the major; "you had better tell him, Tom, to hold his tongue until he is asked to speak, and in fact to leave us. But he is right. A slave who had been employed in carrying ivory for the Arabs would bear the marks of a collar and fetters. Looking at that handsome Ankoli I failed to find these marks, and suspected the man. You will see now that I framed my questions in such a way as to give him rope, and the way he acted his part and worked up the passion was amazingly clever. But he overdid it, as they always will. What do you make of it all, Lister?"

Now in a scrimmage Captain Lister was a host in himself, but at the council-board he was not fluent. Contentedly pulling at his short brier, all he said was:

"Rummy, eh? What!"

Things had meanwhile been crystallizing in Tom's mind. The ambush had been foremost in his thoughts for many days past; possibly that was the reason why the suggestion came from him. However that may be, it was he who remarked quietly:

"D'you think the pretended slave is a confederate of the guide's, Uncle?"

The major looked dubious. He liked to see every step in the process--all the working of the sum, so to speak.

"Fadl," he said, "just order the guide Munta to step this way."

The major's orderly, a Soudanese more than six feet high, stalked into the camp square.

"Now, Mbutu," called the major, "come here; I want you to stand out of sight in the tent there till I beckon you. By the way, Tom, that dago fellow had a name, I suppose. What is it?"

"I never heard it, Uncle. Mbutu has always called him 'old master' or 'dago man' to me. What was your master's name, Mbutu?"

"Black man call him debbil, sah."

"Never mind what the black man calls him, what do the Arabs call him? What did this guide of ours call him?"

"Call him señor, padrone; one time call him Castro, one time more call him Carvalho; him lot names too many."

"Bedad now," exclaimed the doctor, "it all comes back to me. Carvalho!--of course, 'tis the name of the Portuguese who gave us no end of trouble in Quid Calabar ten years ago. I disremimbered'm entirely; ten years makes a terrible difference in a man, to be sure; though when I saw Tom knock him down there was something in the creature's scowl that seemed familiar. Sure an' I ought to have remimbered his bumps. A desp'rate ruff'n of a fellow, Major. He came to me wance to be stitched up after getting mauled in a drunken brawl, an' I got to know a thing or two about'm. Ah! an' there was wan curious affair he was mixed up in that--

"I'm afraid the story must keep, Doctor; here's the guide."

Captain Lister put down his pipe; Lieutenant Mumford lit a cigarette. The Arab, or rather half-caste, approached confidently and saluted. The major looked up.

"Have you any reason to give," he said quietly, "why you should not be taken out and shot?"

The man stared open-mouthed at the speaker. His face appeared to turn a bronze-green, and his lips twitched. The major was watching him intently.

"I don't--I don't understand, master," he stammered at length.

"Ah! Let us begin at the beginning. Do you know one Castro, a Portuguese, who was in Kisumu for some days before we started?"

The man, with a strong effort of will, had mastered the agitation into which the major's sudden question had thrown him.

"He is going to brazen it out," said that observant officer to himself; and after the slightest perceptible pause, the Arab replied:

"I do not know him, sir."

"Very well."

He beckoned to Mbutu, who had been standing with his face concealed by the flap of the tent. The Muhima came out into the sunlight.

"Do you know this boy?"

Tom saw the Arab's eyelids quiver.

"No--I do not know him, master. I never saw him before."

Major Burnaby turned to the Muhima.

"Mbutu, is this the man?" he asked.

"Him sure nuff, sah; him gib me kiboko."

"The boy lies. I never saw him; I know nothing about him."

"Very well. I shall have to refresh your memory. Fadl, tell Sergeant Abdullah to bring up a firing-party."

There was a strained silence. The Arab looked round apprehensively as six men of the King's African Rifles came up, ordered arms, and stood rigidly at attention.

The major took his watch from his pocket and laid it on the table in front of him.

"I give you five minutes," he said. "If you do not make up your mind to tell the truth within five minutes by my watch--well, you know what'll happen."

The major glanced significantly at the line of Soudanese. He deliberately cut and lit a cigar. Captain Lister had resumed his pipe and was puffing vigorously; Lieutenant Mumford gripped the sides of his seat, and stared; while the doctor was apparently examining the Arab's anatomy with a quite professional interest. To Tom his uncle was appearing in a new light, commanding a new respect and admiration; and as to Mbutu, he was patently overawed by the stern imperturbability of "sah him uncle".

The minutes went by. The silence of the bright morning was broken only by the varied sounds of movement in the camp: the laughter of the Zanzibaris; the clash of a cook's pan; the bleat of a goat led to the slaughter.

"You have half a minute," said the major suddenly.

"I know nothing, master, nothing at all," replied the guide, his lips quivering.

There was again silence. Then the major rapped his hand on the table.

"Now!" he said. "What have you to say?"

"I know nothing about it, nothing about it!" persisted the man.

"I've no time to waste," said the major curtly, replacing his watch. "Sergeant, take him away."

Two of the tall Soudanese laid their hands on the guide's arms. He wriggled out of their grasp and flung himself on the ground. They seized him again, assisted by their comrades; and, struggling desperately, crying continually: "I know nothing about it, know nothing about it!" he was carried away. Tom's heart was in his mouth, and Mumford had sprung up in his excitement. Captain Lister still smoked on placidly; while the major's lips were grimly set as he watched the man's contortions. He had been borne but a few yards when his writhing suddenly ceased.

"Don't take me away, don't take me away!" he shrieked. "I will tell, I will tell!"

At a sign from the major the Soudanese returned to the tent, and the wretched man stood before him, thoroughly cowed, and trembling in every limb.

"You will tell! Perhaps you are wise. You will tell me everything from the beginning. Mind, I make no promises; but it is your only chance!"

The major dismissed the Soudanese, and the man began in a low faint voice to tell his story. It was as follows:--

About two miles before reaching Imubinga, the path led across a mountain stream some ten feet deep and thirty wide, spanned by a native bridge. The river had cut a deep ravine between two high hills, and its steep banks were covered with dense forest growth, huge trees crowning the summit. The bank at which the expedition would first arrive had been unequally worn away, and some two hundred and fifty feet above the stream, almost overhanging the bridge, was a prominent bluff, projecting, as the guide put it, like the nose from a man's face. This had been the scene of a memorable incident during the invasion of the district by the Baganda some fifty years before. As a force of Baganda were crossing the bridge, a number of tree trunks, previously felled, had been rolled over the edge of the bluff, and crashing down upon them had killed many outright, and thrown the whole force into such confusion that it fell an easy prey to the enemy. The Baganda were massacred almost to a man. This incident had passed into the traditions of the country; warriors sang about it round their camp-fires, and mothers crooned their babies to rest with the song of "The Ambush by the Bridge".

The same plan was to be pursued now. In the fifty years which had elapsed since the earlier ambuscade, trees had again grown to maturity on the headland. Some of these had been felled, and the moment was to be seized, when half the column had crossed the river, to roll the trunks down upon the bridge. The Arabs, meanwhile, and their Manyema warriors, divided into two bands, one up and the other down stream, would be lying concealed in the forest sufficiently far from the bridge to avoid the British scouts. When the logs had been hurled down, and the troops were in confusion, a signal was to be given from the summit of the bluff; the Arabs were to emerge from their hiding-places, and make a simultaneous attack on the force hemmed in between them. They reckoned that the rear part of the column, deprived of the support of those who had already passed over the bridge, and encumbered with the baggage, would be as sheep in their hands. These having been disposed of, the first half, left without any reserve of ammunition and food, could be dealt with at leisure.

"Jolly good scheme!" remarked Captain Lister admiringly, between two puffs, when the man had finished his story.

"They must think we're pretty green, sir," said Lieutenant Mumford, unable to conceal his scorn of such tactics. Captain Lister eyed him for a moment, but said nothing. The major was drumming on the table, looking thoughtfully at the guide, while the doctor waved a handkerchief to keep off the flies.

"That is the truth, is it?" said the major at last. "And you were sent to help

me to find the way! I have heard of worse schemes. But how did you expect to escape?"

The Arab shifted his feet uneasily.

"Not that that matters. But I should like to know a little more. I am not marching against the Arabs; why are your friends so concerned about our operations against a native chief? What is the motive? Tell me that."

Relieved that the major's interrogation was no longer so uncomfortably personal to himself, the guide went on with his narrative.

Far away in the west, he said, beyond Imubinga, beyond the Rutchuru and the hills, in the heart of the Congo forest, his friends had a stronghold, so well hidden that the forces of the Congo Free State had never succeeded in finding it. Even if they had found it they would have failed to take it, for the place was absolutely impregnable. To this fortress a remnant of Arab dealers in ivory and slaves had retired when the power of Hamed ben Juna, more commonly known by the natives' nickname, Tippu Tib, and his lieutenants was broken by the Belgian forces, and there they still pursued their vocation by stealth, their spies marking every movement of the Free State officials, their allies drawing the enemy off when he came dangerously near. In the course of some years they had amassed a huge store of ivory, and collected some thousands of slaves, some of these latter being employed in tilling the soil and supplying their captors with the necessaries of life; while others were traded away for ivory to the cannibal tribes of the middle Congo. It was, however, becoming increasingly difficult to elude the Free State authorities, and the circle of their traffic was gradually narrowing. The old chief Rumaliza, whom the Belgians supposed to have died in the forest after the capture of Kabambari, was still alive, looking with alarm at the prospect of having to feed his horde of slaves without any chance of a profitable deal. Hemmed in by the British, German, and Free State territories, which were all being brought rapidly under effective control by the respective European administrators, he foresaw inevitable ruin, soon or late. He was anxious, therefore, to realize his wealth and retire to the coast, and in pursuance of this aim he had resolved on one final coup, a last expiring effort of the slave-trade. His plan was to form a huge caravan, transport all his slaves to the coast, and ship them to Arabia.

"Oh, come now!" exclaimed the major at this point, "that must be nonsense. It's close on a thousand miles to the nearest point of the coast, and your friends are not fools enough to imagine that they could make a slave run without having us upon their tracks."

Then the guide proceeded to unfold a plot at which his younger hearers held their breath, and even the major himself, old and seasoned hand as he was, could scarcely restrain an exclamation of astonishment. The Arabs, said the man, had in their camp a number of deposed Banyoro and Baganda chiefs, whose conduct

had been such as to preclude any chance of their regaining their position while the British occupation continued. These men, having nothing to lose and everything to gain, had established communications with every Mahomedan in Uganda and Unyoro who was known to be disaffected. At a given signal the latter were to rise; and the signal was to be the defeat of a British column. Where the defeat was to take place had not been disclosed to the disaffected in Uganda, lest the plot should be divulged. It had been perfected by the Portuguese during his stay in Kisumu. It was known that only a weak British force was available for operations in the southern part of the Protectorate. A small native chief was to be persuaded to revolt, and it was hoped that the affair would be regarded as of so little consequence that only a handful of troops would be employed to crush him. The revolt had taken place as arranged, but owing to Major Burnaby's energy the punitive column was stronger than the Arabs had anticipated. Still, with a numerical advantage of two to one, without counting their native allies and dependants, the Arabs were not so much disheartened as to abandon their plans. They confidently expected that the ambush would result in the annihilation of the British force. The news was to be conveyed to the scattered conspirators with the rapidity with which news always flies through native Africa; a picked force was to seize rail-head, after overpowering, or at least harassing, the small garrisons at Entebbe, Kisumu, and other military stations, and, if possible, to foment a general rising among the populace. Taking advantage of the confusion, the Arabs, with their satellites, were to run the slaves by forced marches to the western shore of the Nyanza, carry them over in canoes, and thence for a hundred and fifty miles along the railway, and then make for a spot on the coast of Italian Somaliland, whence they could ship them to Arabia.

"'Faith, I would like to examine the cranium of the man who devised that crazy scheme!" cried the doctor. "He must be's mad's a hatter!"

The major was in no mood to indulge in quips with Dr. O'Brien. His mind was wholly concentrated on the task which had opened before him. He sat silent and abstracted, seeming even to have forgotten the presence of the traitor. Recovering himself in a moment, he said quietly:

"Go away. You will be kept under arrest for the rest of the march; see to that, Mr. Mumford. When we are through with this business I'll consider what's to be done with you. Take him away. There's the other man now," continued the major, when the guide had been removed. "It is just worth while to see if his story corroborates the one we have just heard. Fadl, fetch the captured slave."

It was short work with him. A rumour had already run through the camp that the guide was in trouble, and the Ankoli wore an anxious look when he came up. The major told him in one sentence that his friend Munta had confessed; and the man at once volunteered to unbosom himself. His story differed from the

other merely in ornaments. To the major's enquiries he replied that the Arabs were about nine hundred and fifty strong, and their allies rather more than a thousand. Many of the former were armed with Mausers, smuggled in through German East Africa. The rest of them had Sniders and other obsolete rifles ("Good enough in forest fighting" was the practical remark of Captain Lister), while the Manyema for the most part had only very old muskets in addition to spears.

"That rings true," said the major. "Has he anything more to tell?"

"Him say true, all berrah much," said Mbutu, who had interpreted. "Eberyfing told; know no more."

"Very well Fadl, take him and tie him up. Gentlemen, it is now past eleven o'clock. We will strike camp and be off in about an hour. We have, it appears, between five and six miles to go. That will take us full two hours. If the story we have heard is true--and for myself, strange as it is, I have no doubt about it--we shall have no difficulty in locating these Arabs. We shall fight at three; that will leave us three hours of daylight. That will suffice, I think. Lister, I should like a word with you."

"That means tactics, I suppose," said the doctor. "Well, while you're talking, I will tache Tom to help me pick up the pieces. Come along, my bhoy."

CHAPTER VII

Ambuscading an Ambush

Approaching the River--Reconnoitring--The Fight on the Bluff--Checking a Rush--Timely Help--A Hand-to-Hand Struggle--At Fault

Tom was that day amazed to see what could be done in an hour's time by a force of Askaris capably directed. By half-past twelve the officers' tents had been rolled up, the baggage repacked, a meal swallowed, the carriers marshalled, each with his proper load, and the order of march arranged. Before one the whole column had moved out towards the scene of the anticipated fight. Scouts led the way, under Lieutenant Mumford. Then came the advance-guard, two companies of Askaris and a Maxim-gun, with Captain Lister. At a short interval followed more Soudanese, with Major Burnaby; then came the carriers with their guard, and finally the rear-guard, of which Tom found himself in command. Dr. O'Brien hovered about, first at one part of the column, then at another, in case of what he

called "evenshualities".

Before giving the order to march, the major beckoned Tom apart.

"Tom," he said, "here's a rifle and a revolver for you. You know how to use the rifle, at any rate. Fate seems to have a hand in this, and as you're here, you must make yourself useful."

Tom's eyes gleamed as he took the weapon, and he mentally resolved to bear himself worthily, whatever was in store. His elation was a little dashed when his uncle went on:

"You'll consider yourself in command of the rear-guard. Judging by your conduct since you left Kisumu, you are able to win the respect of the natives, and that's everything. You'll find the non-coms. a steady set of men; and remember, you must rely on them and yourself. You mustn't worry me with questions about this, that, and t'other thing."

"All right, Uncle! I'm only too glad to be able to do anything."

"Very well then; I'll send for you if I want you."

Tom wished that he could have been with the advance-guard, but he kept that to himself, hoping that the chances of the day would give him an opportunity of doing even the smallest thing to justify his uncle's confidence. Then the march began. Askaris and carriers tramped on in single file, the Zanzibaris chattering and laughing in spite of the loads on their heads, it being one of the crosses of the major's existence that their tongues were never still. Some of them had kerosene cans slung round their necks, in clanging emptiness, for they had not as yet been needed, the rivulets along the route having furnished plenty of good drinking-water. Others carried bales and provision-boxes cleverly poised on their heads, each load averaging from forty to fifty pounds; while the rest bore large bags of onions (a favourite food with the native troops), tent-poles, pots and kettles, and other paraphernalia of the camp.

The pace was slow, and, thanks to the doctor's careful ministrations, Tom was able to keep up without difficulty. He would not confess even to himself that a full day's rest would have been grateful to him. The mid-day sun beat down upon the marching column with scorching ferocity. For some distance the narrow path led over rolling country, broken here and there by rocky excrescences, with not an inch of shade, the only relief being afforded now and again by a brook, in which the men bathed their aching feet. At length, however, the appearance of scrub and trees ahead proclaimed the proximity of a larger stream. Tom had been wondering all the way what tactics his uncle would employ to checkmate the plans of the Arabs. He saw now that scouts were being sent out on each flank, and word was passed down the column for the carriers to group themselves instead of marching in single file, and for the rear-guard to close up. While moving in open country the major had decided to make no change in the usual method of

marching, so that nothing might suggest to the enemy, if he was on the look-out, that any special precautions were being taken. But now that the column had entered a wooded region, and was nearing the expected scene of operations, he thought it well to make his force more compact, especially as the path had here broadened into quite a respectable road. The scouts on the flanks had orders not to penetrate more than half a mile into the forest on either side, the trees being close enough together to prevent anything in the nature of a rush beyond that limit.

It was now nearly three o'clock. The major ordered the guide to be brought to him, and questioned him on their distance from the river. Learning that it was no more than three-quarters of a mile ahead, he called a halt and sent for his officers.

"Now, gentlemen," he said to the little group, "I assume that the story told by the guide is true. Our scouts have not sighted the enemy, which is pretty clear proof that if there is an enemy at all he is hiding. I am going to send sixteen picked men up the rear of the bluff--you see it rising yonder--from which, according to these men, the logs are to be flung down on to the bridge. Our fellows will dispose of the eight or nine Arabs who, it appears, are to manage the logs. They will then give the signal awaited by the enemy, who, we may suppose, are in hiding at least half a mile up and down stream, and these will come on, expecting to find us cut in two at the bridge and generally in confusion.--Well, what is it, Mumford?"

"I was wondering, sir," began the lieutenant, rather taken aback at finding his thoughts half-guessed-at by the major; "I was wondering what would happen if our men failed to dispose of the Arabs on the bluff."

"The enemy's plans would be spoilt, at any rate, and the engagement would develop on other lines. But the chances are in our favour. The bluff, as you see, is thickly wooded, and our men should be able to creep up quite noiselessly and get within striking distance without being seen. Besides, we will distract the enemy's attention. Remember, they are relying on our complete ignorance of their scheme. They will be impatient to see us cross the bridge. Well, I shall send a few scouts over to guard against a possible attack from the other side, and Captain Lister, with two or three men, will feign a careful examination of the bridge itself. The delay will probably be unexpected, and I count on this to enable our men to scale the bluff unperceived.

"Meanwhile the carriers will park all the baggage in a semicircle about the bridge head, under guard. I shall divide the force, taking part with me to repel the attack from the north--Mumford, you will work the Maxim--and leaving you, Lister, to meet the attack from the south. Doctor, you will come with me, I think, as mine will be the larger force; and Tom, you will remain in charge of the baggage."

Tom tried to look pleased, but his face fell in spite of him. There was no

help for it; he must obey orders and accept his strictly defensive part with a good grace.

"I cannot tell you our precise positions yet until scouts have been up and down the river and reported on the nature of the ground. Meanwhile, Lister, you will send forward, say, five scouts over the bridge, and the rest of us will move slowly behind you."

Tom's pulse quickened as he listened to these plain directions. He wished he could change places with Captain Lister, as that officer went forward with the advance-guard to perform the task allotted him. In less than fifteen minutes the bulk of the force reached the bridge head. The scouts had already crossed, and were disappearing into the wooded country beyond. Other scouts had been sent out on each flank to examine the country up and down stream, and the captain, with two sergeants, was inspecting the bridge with a critical eye. On reaching the river-bank the major found that the water ran deep and the sides were precipitous. The bluff was inaccessible except from the rear, rising sheer up from the bed of the river and the path. Both up and down stream the country was dotted with scrub, and at the distance of about a hundred yards on each side of the path began a belt of forest, through, which the scouts were picking their way in skirmishing order.

"We have less than three hours of daylight left," said the major to Captain Lister at the bridge head, "so that we must put this business through as rapidly as possible. I hope you ordered the scouts to proceed cautiously, and not go too far. Half a mile will suit our book."

"Yes, and here are the down-stream fellows returning." A sergeant came up to the major and reported that, having skirted the bluff and crossed a belt of thin forest, he had come within six minutes to an open space, with a frontage of about two hundred yards and a breadth of some four hundred and fifty. This was absolutely free from trees or bush, but on the other side of it the forest was much thicker.

"Depend upon it, then, the Arabs, if here at all, are hiding in the forest beyond the clearing. We have them, Lister. If there are any up-stream they are evidently farther away. As the forest is much denser in that direction I think a hundred men with you will suffice to beat off any attack on that side; you must get your men to cut down some trees and form a rough abattis. The rest of the force will come northwards with me. We must take advantage of that clearing. Now it's time to send up the bluff and account for the log-rollers; that will prove conclusively how far these men have told the truth. I think we understand each other."

Captain Lister nodded. In a few minutes his men were busy felling the trees with the thickest foliage. They cut a wedge in the trunks with their axes, then toppled them over in the same direction as the strokes had fallen, so that they

formed a high and almost impenetrable barrier.

Meanwhile Tom had already arranged the baggage in a semicircle about the bridge head, hidden by a jutting rock from anyone who might be at the summit of the bluff. Within the enclosure thus formed the carriers were assembled, and the rampart itself was defended by twenty-five men.

Fifteen of the most trustworthy of the Askaris, under Sergeant Abdullah, were by this time scaling the bluff from the rear, darting from tree to tree with wonderful celerity, their feet bare, their right hands clutching their rifles with bayonets fixed. They drew nearer and nearer to the summit, maintaining as even a line as the nature of the ground permitted, each man being about two yards from the next. When they came within a few yards of the top, and saw by the growing light that beyond them the trees had been felled, they moved still more warily. Thus they advanced to the very edge of the forest, and halted. Peeping from behind the trees they saw nine Arabs in front of them, not twenty paces away. Some were talking in low excited whispers, two were lying flat on their faces, peering over the three shaven tree-trunks that lay in readiness at the very edge of the precipice, and turning occasionally to make some comment on the proceedings.

[image]

Plan of the Battle of Imubinga.

On the logs rested half a dozen short, strong poles, evidently to be used as levers. The Arabs had expected the marching force to cross the bridge at once, and the delay had at first caused them much amazement and concern. But seeing the scouts pass over and scatter on the other side, and the careful examination of the bridge made by Captain Lister and his sergeants, they had apparently concluded that these were only the white man's usual measures of precaution, and were reassured. They had themselves taken the precaution to post a sentry a hundred yards down the bluff behind them, but this man, finding after a long delay that nothing had happened, edged gradually nearer to his companions, and when he saw them looking with intense interest over the ridge, his curiosity was too much for him. He quickened his pace and joined them, and from that moment caution was thrown to the winds.

Just as the Askaris reached the utmost verge of cover, and stood for an instant to take breath after their climb, one of the Arabs gleefully pointed to the scouts returning over the bridge. His companions instantly moved towards the brink. Sergeant Abdullah saw that the moment had arrived. He gave a nod to his

men, they sprang forward with great leaps, remembering the major's injunction to make no noise. Before the Arabs were aware of their danger the enemy were upon them. Seven of the nine were despatched with the bayonet in a trice; one contrived to inflict a terrible wound on his assailant before he too was stricken down; the ninth man, with a howl of fright, sprang over the precipice and disappeared into the stream below.

The first part of the task of the sixteen was accomplished. Climb and all it had occupied but twenty minutes. There remained to give the signal expected by the Arabs in hiding. On the ground lay a white flag embroidered with the crescent. Abdullah stooped down, and hastily divesting one of the fallen Arabs of his burnous, he threw it over his own uniform, then picked up the flag, and walked northwards some thirty yards along the bluff to the edge of the declivity, whence he obtained a view of the open space and the forest beyond. Then he waved the flag, making three curious circular movements with which he was clearly familiar; he saw an answering signal from the edge of the forest more than half a mile away; then he returned to his companions, and hurried downhill with twelve of them to rejoin Captain Lister's force, leaving two to follow more leisurely with the man wounded.

In the meantime the major had rapidly moved his three hundred men northwards through the woodland. On the way he left fifty of them in open order on a wide arc to cover his right flank. Coming to the open space reported by the scouts, he was overjoyed to find it an outcrop of bare rock, broken in surface, cleft by fissures, and thus difficult to advance over. His quick eye marked at a glance the possibilities of the situation. He posted a hundred of his men about a yard apart, just within the edge of the forest, and stationed a second hundred twenty yards behind them as a reserve. The remaining fifty he told off to guard the left flank against surprise from the river-bed. At the extreme right of his position, a few yards in advance of the firing-line, stood one solitary thorn bush growing on a patch of soft earth amid the rock. This would form, as the major saw at once, an excellent screen for the Maxim; but to place the gun in position at once would certainly attract the attention of the Arabs. He therefore ordered Lieutenant Mumford to be in readiness to move it forward as soon as the enemy emerged from the wood.

"Now, my men," he said to the sergeants when his dispositions were complete, "when the signal is given from the bluff the Arabs will come out of the forest yonder and cross this open space. They know nothing, as I hope and trust, of our presence. They will not expect us here. Reserve your fire till they are within two hundred and fifty yards--the bugle will give the signal,--then fire. That will check the rush for a moment. There will be time for a second volley; then be ready to charge. Mr. Mumford, you will bring the Maxim into action as soon as they are

well out in the open. Now mind, men," he added, turning sternly to the eager Askaris, "not a whisper till the word is given."

The men stood at their posts, fixing their keen eyes on the trees a quarter of a mile in front of them, their mouths set, their nostrils quivering. It was a trying ordeal. Minute after minute went by, and still there was no sign of the enemy. The men began to fidget, and the major, knowing the impetuous nature of the Soudanese, feared lest a single incautious movement or exclamation should wreck his plans. Then suddenly a hundred doors seemed to open in the green wall opposite, and out of them poured almost noiselessly a flood of tall, white-robed, turbaned Arabs. They kept no order, expecting to find their enemy in confusion by the bridge. In this careless confidence they rushed on pell-mell, clutching their rifles by the middle. Over the rocky ground they came, bounding like panthers, making no sound save with their quick breathing, eager, exultant, some waving flags, their leaders brandishing scimitars, a few with silent drums jolting against their thighs. Then a bugle rang out clear and shrill; from the trees and undergrowth in their front flashed forth a withering volley. The nearest of them went down like grass before the mower. There was an awful silence, broken only by the groans of wounded and dying men. Those of the foremost Arabs who were left alive halted in consternation, hesitating whether to advance or fly. But behind them a host of their Manyema allies was thronging from the woods. These had heard the volley, but had seen nothing of its effect. Imagining that the expected collision had taken place earlier than had been anticipated they pressed on furiously, now uttering savage cries, beating drums, invoking Allah and the Prophet. Thus the halted front ranks were driven on by the mass behind; Arabs and Manyema were crowded together in an unwieldy congested heap. Another volley rang out in front of them; the rattle of the Maxim, now playing across the crowded space, added its terrors to the scene. The stricken host fell in heaps before the pitiless hail of lead; then, in uncontrollable panic, they turned tail and fled, trampling each other down in their terror, carrying all before them in one irresistible rush to the shelter of the wood.

And now, with a fierce yell, the Soudanese darted after them with the bayonet. But in the lull that followed the first wild onset, the major's ear caught the sound of heavy firing in his rear. Captain Lister was evidently engaged. The major at once recalled the men from their pursuit, and, leaving Lieutenant Mumford with a hundred rifles to meet a renewed attack should the enemy recover from their panic, he hurried back with the main part of his force to support the hundred with Captain Lister up-stream.

He found the little body hard pressed. At the sound of firing to the north, a force of three hundred and fifty Arabs, supported by nearly five hundred natives, had emerged from their place of concealment in the forest. Checked in their rush

by the abattis, they had made a second impetuous charge, losing heavily from the well-directed volleys of Captain Lister's men. But they had soon perceived the smallness of the force opposed to them, and, dividing into two bands, they made simultaneous attacks at both ends of the line. The Soudanese at the river-end staggered, and, being more exposed than the rest of the line, gave way. Instantly a few score Arabs broke through, and, true to their rapacious instincts, made direct for the baggage. Tom, who had been eating his heart out with impatience, saw that he was likely after all to have his fill of fighting. It seemed almost impossible that his handful of men could hold their own against the wild rush of the enemy, but the steady nerve which had served him so well in many a mimic battle did not fail him in this his first experience of real warfare. Bidding his men kneel and rest their rifles on the piled boxes, he waited till the Arabs were within fifty yards, then gave the order to fire. The assailants broke like a wave upon a rock. The most of them fell prone; a few, with desperate courage, came on till the Askaris could almost feel their breath; then cold steel completed what the bullet had begun.

In the meantime the other end of the British line was yielding before repeated rushes, being hampered by the necessity of guarding the left flank against the black crowds of Manyema pressing perilously near. It was at this critical moment that the major returned with his exultant troops. Charging downhill at tremendous speed, they swept to the support of their comrades, and after a severe hand-to-hand fight against great odds, they drove the enemy steadily back into the forest, with terrible loss.

It was now half-past four. The fight at the clearing having been won without a single casualty on the British side, Dr. O'Brien was free to attend to the thirty wounded men who, with about half as many dead, bore witness to the severity of the struggle by the abattis. Meanwhile, Captain Lister was leading his men in pursuit of the fugitives. Suddenly the crackle of musketry broke out again far away to the north-east. The major turned at the sound. He caught sight of the rampart of baggage, of the stricken forms lying close beneath it, of Tom standing among his men.

"Tom," he said, with quick resolution, "I want you to take your unwounded men up to Mumford and see if he is really being attacked again. Some of the less severely wounded can guard the baggage. If he wants help send your boy or one of the men back to me, and I'll move up in support."

The major's tone was quiet and matter-of-fact, as though his command was quite in the ordinary course of things. Tom needed no repetition of the order; vowing that Uncle Jack was a brick, he started at once with twenty-five men and Mbutu. He had been hoping against hope for such a moment. Only with the greatest difficulty had he refrained from leaping into the fray by the abattis when he saw Captain Lister so hard pressed and defending his position so gallantly.

He reached Lieutenant Mumford's force at an opportune moment. The Arab chief, after his men had been hurled back by the enemy, had striven desperately to rally them. Collecting some two hundred and fifty of the survivors, and hearing, as the major had done, the sound of brisk firing to the south, he conceived the idea of making a circuit and joining his friends above the bridge. He had already made some progress in that direction, and had actually come into touch with the extended line of flankers, when he was informed by a scout, whom he had sent to reconnoitre, that the British commander was withdrawing the larger part of his force to the assistance of a second body up-stream. The Arab instantly wheeled round; his band was being augmented every moment by returning fugitives, and he saw an opportunity to fall upon and overwhelm the small British force left behind. Lieutenant Mumford quickly divined his intention, and foresaw the direction of the threatened attack. He at once changed front, and, turning the Maxim round at right angles to its former position, left it in the hands of a non-commissioned officer, while he himself took the general command. He posted his men on two sides of a square, thus forming a wedge. The position was partly protected by undergrowth, but the trees were not so close together as to afford complete cover, and the advantage of the ground lay rather with the massing Arabs.

Tom arrived just as a first charge had been repulsed. Firing in sections, the Soudanese had laid many of the Arabs low, and the onset was checked for a moment. But the Arab chief was in no mood to brook cowardice or hesitation. Conspicuous by his huge stature and a red sash over his shoulder, he rallied his men once more. They came on through the scrub, with defiant cries of "Allah-il-Allah!" firing as they came, and taking advantage of cover to make rushes and draw nearer and nearer to the British lines. Tom's twenty-five men were a welcome reinforcement, for a dozen of the little force were already *hors de combat*, and the Maxim had jammed. Quickly ranging themselves with their comrades, the new-comers brought their rifles to their shoulders and fired, and once more the Arab advance was checked.

"Couldn't we try a charge?" suggested Tom to the lieutenant. "My men are eager to have at the enemy."

"Yes; now is the moment. It's touch and go. Men, fix bayonets; charge!"

Mumford at the left of the line, Tom at the right, followed immediately by Mbutu, they sprang forward with a resounding cheer. Past the bushes, dodging in and out among the trees, the gallant little force made at the enemy. The Arabs had collected in a comparatively clear space within the forest, and as the charging Askaris came upon them they parted into two bands, which moved away from each other as though to take the attacking party on both flanks. Mumford immediately wheeled half his line to the left, shouting to Tom to deal similarly with the

right-hand body.

"Now, my boys," cried Tom, "we've not done much to-day. It's our turn at last. Come along!"

The willing men followed him with a yell. No turbaned force could stand against them. The Arabs broke and scattered, and the headstrong Askaris dashed after them in mad pursuit. The chief, with half a dozen devoted followers, made a gallant attempt to check the rush. He stood, a giant among his men, swinging his curved scimitar, passionately objurgating the fugitives, and even cutting some of them down as they ran. But neither his example nor his threats availed to stay the rout. His men fled for their lives. He himself seemed to bear a charmed life; though he formed so conspicuous a target, he was as yet untouched. Now Tom marked him as he stood in deep impotent wrath, alone, save for a body-guard of four. Tom's eye flashed with a sudden resolve.

[image]

A Mêlée in the Forest

"Mbutu," he cried, "and you, Sadi, come with me and capture that big fellow. Now, one, two, three--with me, boys!"

Giving his rifle to Mbutu he sprang forward, revolver in hand, followed by the Muhima and a huge Somali private, who had been laying about him doughtily with his rifle clubbed. The chief saw the three speeding towards him, and like a gallant warrior stayed to face his foe. The Somali, leaping with tremendous strides, was the first to get to close quarters. With his clubbed rifle he beat down the bayonet of one of the Arabs and stretched him upon the ground; but it was his last stroke, for the chief made a lunge forward, and with his keen blade pierced him to the heart. He fell against Tom, knocking his helmet off his head, and out of his hand the revolver with which he had just accounted for one of the chief's body-guard. Quick as thought Tom pounced on the fallen man's rifle, and was erect again just in time to beat off the descending scimitar. It was now a desperate hand-to-hand fight, bayonet against sword. The red beams of the setting sun caught the curved blade as it swept about Tom's head and body, but not for an instant did his keen eye falter. Following his opponent's every movement, and grasping the rifle firmly with both hands, he parried thrust and beat aside lunge, ready to strike home if he saw the hair's-breadth of an opportunity. Now the lessons of the sergeant-major at school bore good fruit; and if that officer could have seen the flower of his cadet corps bearing himself so manfully in this fierce duel, he would have owned himself content.

All this time Mbutu, agile as a cat, had been desperately engaging the two remaining Arabs, determined to prevent them from going to the chief's assistance, and burning to pay off old scores upon the kindred of his former persecutors. The level rays of the sun, coming from behind his back, dazzled his opponents' eyes, so that they had much ado to elude the thrusts of his bayonet. At length he got within the guard of one of them, and wounded him in the sword-arm. As they fought they had edged close up to where Tom and the Arab were still in deadly conflict. With indomitable pluck the wounded Arab stooped, picked up his sword with his left hand, and before Mbutu, now hotly engaged with the last man, could interpose, the Arab smote at Tom from below with a stroke which wounded his defenceless head, and he fell to the ground. That same instant, Mbutu ran the fourth man through the body, and, turning to despatch the wounded Arab, received a deep cut from the chief's sword in his right shoulder.

Only Tom's fallen body, impeding the Arab, saved the Muhima from a second desperate blow. The blood-stained scimitar was raised to strike a third time, when a distant bugle rang out. The chief's arm was stayed in mid-air; he gazed eagerly over Mbutu's head into the forest. No British troops were to be seen; but the Arab, after a moment's irresolution, appeared to decide that the bugle-call was the signal for another advance, and fearing to be cut off entirely from his friends, he turned and disappeared among the trees. Mbutu, however, had recognized the notes of the recall, and wondered what he was to do. He bent down to examine his master's prostrate body. Finding that he still breathed, he tried to lift him, but loss of blood from his wound and his own fierce exertions had exhausted him, and he laid Tom gently down, feeling anxious and distressed. A minute's consideration showed him that he must follow the retiring troops and bring assistance. He started at once in the gathering darkness, but being weaker than he had supposed, he could walk but slowly. It was more than half an hour before he reached the British lines, just after Lieutenant Mumford had rejoined the major, who had set his men to form a strong zariba. To the major's anxious enquiry for Tom, Mumford replied that, having seen him go off to the right and not return, he had taken it for granted that he would come into touch with the main body. At this moment Mbutu staggered up. In faint, laboured tones he explained what had happened, and begged that a party might be sent at once to bring his master in.

The major gave a gasp of relief when he heard that his nephew, though wounded, was still alive.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed. '"Now to find him before it is quite dark."

The major himself, with twenty men, accompanied Mbutu in search of his master. The Muhima nearly fainted as he started, and Dr. O'Brien, giving him some brandy and hastily bandaging the torn shoulder, declared that he too must go in case of "evenshualities". The party hurried off, and went as quickly as Mbutu's

condition permitted, supported as he was between Fadl and Abdullah. With native sureness he led them, as the sun set across the river, straight to the spot where he had left his master. It was just light enough to see several human forms strewn upon the trampled grass. Mbutu bent down to examine the bodies, and the little party shivered as the long whine of a jackal came swelling up from the distance, waking its echo from the rocky escarpments of the river. The Muhima went swiftly from body to body, then uttered a forlorn and heart-broken cry.

"Not here! not here!" bewailed.

Major Burnaby and the doctor both stooped in consternation. There were five bodies. One was that of Sadi the Somali, the rest were Arabs. Tom was no longer there!

A dreadful silence fell upon the group. Mbutu stood as though paralysed. The major and Dr. O'Brien looked mutely into each other's eyes.

"Toots!" ejaculated the doctor at length, giving himself an impatient shake. "Recovered consciousness and walked off, of course he did. That's what it is, to be sure. Must have been a slight wound, you see."

"What can we do, Doctor?" said the major. "We can't search for him in the dark; we might be cut down by the Arabs anywhere. The moon rises late; he will hardly find his way."

"Get back to camp and blow a blast on your bugles and send up rockets; he will hear one or see t'other, and come into camp. Never fear, that young fellow's safe enough. He didn't come dancing here from the ends of the earth to be sent to kingdom-come by Arabs."

Dr. O'Brien's cheerfulness, though it was more than half assumed, somewhat reassured the major. The party returned rapidly to camp, and there bugles were blown and rockets skied as had been suggested. But though the blare and the illumination were continued far into the night, the major watched for Tom in vain, shuddering as he heard the melancholy howl of jackals far and near, and longing for the dawn.

CHAPTER VIII

In the Toils

With the Raiders--The Hakim--Mustapha--A Trap--In a Slave Camp--Man's Inhumanity--De Castro Again--De Castro Eloquent

A few minutes after Mbutu had left his master to go on his painful quest for help, four big Manyema warriors came bounding through the forest. They carried spears, the iron heads of which were as yet clear of blood. When they caught sight of the six prostrate bodies in the narrow glade they halted, and with one consent bent down to rifle the dead. They had stripped two of the Arabs of what small articles of value they possessed, when the negro who had stooped over Tom's body uttered a sharp exclamation, at which his companions left their gruesome occupation and came hastily to his side. As he was tearing a button from Tom's coat, the eyes of the apparent corpse had opened for an instant, and the body had moved uneasily. The four men stooped, peering at it, talking excitedly, and waxing hotter and hotter in argument. Three of them were for spearing the body at once, declaring that, from the nature of the wound, death was inevitable, and that they might as well hasten matters and share the spoil. But the man who had come first upon the scene obstinately opposed this course. It was the body of an Englishman, he said; there was still life in him; and it would tend very much to their advantage to keep him alive and carry him to the Arab chief, who would no doubt reward them handsomely for so valuable a prize. As a final argument, he reminded his friends that they had been among the first to bolt from the field, and as they were aware of the punishment that awaited them, it was well to propitiate the chief and save their skins. This argument had its effect, and without wasting more time on the fallen Arabs, they prepared to carry Tom away.

The leader tore a strip from the burnous of one of the Arabs, and deftly wound it about Tom's head, to prevent further loss of blood from the deep gash at the base of his skull. The rest as quickly fashioned a litter out of two spears and another burnous; and before Mbutu had walked halfway to the British camp, his master was being borne by the four Manyema swiftly in the opposite direction.

He was still unconscious when the men placed him on the litter. The terrific blow inflicted on him by the Arab, followed by his heavy fall, had been very near causing concussion of the brain, and the loss of blood he had suffered would of itself have deprived him of consciousness. Indeed, but for the opportune arrival of his captors, and the interested thoughtfulness of the man who had bandaged his head, there can be no doubt that Tom Burnaby would in a short time have done with mortality and become a prey to jackals and vultures.

As the Manyema hurried on with elastic stride, the gentle swinging motion of the litter appeared to revive him partially. The moon had just risen, and Tom, opening his eyes, fancied that he was being borne along by the Soudanese who had carried him into camp the day before. His lips moved, and the bearers started when they heard their helpless prisoner muttering light-headedly until he dozed again into quietude.

After the negroes had tramped for about an hour, following a narrow track

by the light of moon and stars, they were stopped by an Arab who came suddenly out of the forest, and demanded of them who they were. He looked with interest at the pale face of the sleeping stripling in the litter, and informed the carriers that he himself was one of a number of scouts left at various points along the track of the Arab chief, to direct stragglers to head-quarters. After the second repulse, and his single-handed fight with Tom, the chief had made no further attempt to rally his men, but struck due north, picking up several parties of fugitives on the way. At the distance of some few miles from the scene of his disaster he knew of a ford over the river, at which he crossed, continuing thence his march in a westerly direction until he reached the right bank of the River Ntungwe, not far from its entrance into Lake Albert Edward. There he encamped for the night, leaving word of his whereabouts, as has been shown, and appointing a general rendezvous at a village on the farther bank of the Rutchuru.

All this the four Manyema learnt from the Arab scout, who, while speaking, had helped himself to Tom's watch and chain, roughly telling the negroes that he would shoot them if they breathed a word of that little performance to the chief. He then allowed them to proceed. They soon afterwards struck into a path leading to the ford, crossed the river under a ghostly moonlight, and reached the encampment an hour before dawn.

Their arrival was not the important event they had anticipated. Shortly before, the Wanyabinga chief against whose village the British expedition was directed, and who had brought a contingent to the Arab force, had come into camp to plead with the Arab for one more attempt to destroy Major Burnaby's little army. He had himself done all he could, he said; he had "eaten up" all his rivals in the neighbouring villages for a score of miles round, in order to starve the British force; his knowledge of the country had proved invaluable to the Arabs in their raids for ivory; and it was due to information given by him that the ambush from which he had expected so much had been planned. It was unfortunate, a calamity only to be ascribed to some ju-ju or medicine-man, that the ambush had failed; but for all that, he contended, his services still merited some reward. If his lord Mustapha was not prepared to make a direct assault on the expeditionary force, he might at least help in the defence of the speaker's village, which was encircled by a triple stockade, and impregnable, he thought, if strongly held.

Now the poor Wanyabinga chief had all along been the dupe of his astute Arab ally. Mustapha had used him entirely for his own ends. He had instigated the acts of insubordination and treachery which Major Burnaby was proceeding to punish, persuading the credulous negro that the white man would before long be altogether expelled from the lake country, and promising, when that happy day came, to establish him, the native chief, as King of Uganda. But the Arab was furious at the failure of his cherished scheme. He was beside himself with

rage, ready to vent it on whatever person or thing came first in his way. His answer to the black chief's plea was a brutal laugh, a curse, a jibe. The Wanyabinga attempted to bring him to reason. "When I am king of Uganda," he said, "I will repay your kindness with hundreds upon hundreds of slaves, and untold wealth of ivory." "You king of Uganda!" retorted Mustapha derisively; "you will one day carry my wash-pot and tie the latchets of my shoe!" The man protested, whereupon the Arab flew into a passion, and, drawing his sword, declared flatly that he would slice the importunate wretch into little pieces if he did not immediately withdraw from his presence. The negro hastily departed, nursing wild purposes of vengeance in his heart.

It was just after this scene that the four tired Manyema brought Tom into the camp. They sought an interview with the chief. He declined to see them. They sent word to him that they had with them a wounded officer of the British force. His answer was that they might kill him and eat him if they pleased. Astonished and crestfallen, they were considering with one another what to do with their captive when the chief's hakim appeared on the scene. Put in possession of the facts, he advised the men to attempt nothing further with Mustapha in his present temper; in the meantime he himself would be answerable for the prisoner. The negroes were loth to let him go without some tangible recompense for their labour; but when the Arab glared at them, and threatened them with the mysteries of his art, with superstitious fear they left their unconscious burden and went moodily away.

Tom owed his life to the skilful tendance of the Arab physician. With such rough appliances and medicaments as he had at hand, the hakim dressed Tom's wounds; he then placed him in a comfortable position by his own watch-fire, and sat by him until daylight.

Tom awoke with the dawn, conscious of a terrible pain at the back of his head, and a feeling all over him of emptiness and collapse. He was too feeble even to be surprised when he saw the grave face of the Arab a few feet from his own.

"Where am I?" he whispered, and wondered at the scarcely audible sound of his own voice. The Arab shook his head. He knew no English. He went away, and returned presently with a cup of some warm liquid, which he administered in drops on a horn spoon. Tom was grateful for the attention; the Arab fed him thus for ten minutes, and the food revived him, bringing a touch of colour into his pale cheeks.

Almost immediately afterwards the order was given to strike camp. By eight o'clock the crowd was in motion. During the night some four hundred Arabs had rallied to the chief, as well as a number of their black allies. But the majority of the Manyema had had their confidence in the Arabs dismally shattered by the event of the previous day, and had dispersed to their homes.

The chief, knowing that he was new in the territory of the Congo Free State, felt pretty secure from pursuit by the British, and had decided to continue his march westward towards the Rutchuru at a moderate pace. He stalked along with downbent head before his troops, reminding Tom, when he saw him presently, of Napoleon in Meissonier's picture of the retreat from Moscow. The hakim had seen him early in the morning, and spoken to him of the English prisoner; and the chief had curtly bidden the physician tend him carefully, as he might be valuable as a hostage. As for him, he had other matters to attend to. Tom learnt later what these other matters were.

The hakim sought out the four Manyema who had brought Tom to the camp, and ordered them to resume their task. The Arab walked by the head of the litter, and when the sun rose higher, he arranged a linen screen above Tom's head, which served to defend him from the burning rays and in some measure from insects.

At mid-day the chief halted to dispose of the business that weighed on him. He first called up the Wanyabinga chief, who had clung to the band in the hope of the Arab's relenting. But Mustapha told him bluntly that if he accompanied the caravan farther it would be as a slave. The man stood trembling for a moment as though paralysed; then muttering awful imprecations, he collected his few tribesmen, brandished his spear thrice, and bolted amid his men across the swamp. Having reached a safe distance he halted, led a chorus of execration, and hurling his spear in a last desperate defiance at his late ally, he turned and disappeared into the bush.

Then the Arab formed a court of six of his leading men, and summoned before him two miserable wretches whom Tom had noticed marching painfully, with shackled feet and wrists, under a close guard. They were charged with cowardice during the first terrible fight on the previous afternoon. In due form they were condemned to death and led away, and shortly afterwards Tom heard two shots. In affairs of this kind the Arabs waste no ammunition.

The march was resumed, and now that he had attended to his other matters, the chief had time to take some notice of Tom, He came up to the litter, and started when he saw that the prisoner was none other than the stripling who had held him in such desperate fight. He grunted, as though in displeasure at discovering his doughty opponent still alive; then a faint smile wreathed his lips, and the cloud that had darkened his face all day cleared away. He spoke rapidly to the hakim, who nodded his head and replied gravely. Tom of course understood nothing of what they said, but he inferred that the physician had declared him out of danger, and that the Arab was calculating on turning the capture to some profit. Giving Tom another glance, in which there was a tinge of admiration for a warrior worthy of his steel, Mustapha returned to his place at the head of the caravan.

Late that night they reached the right bank of the Rutchuru. The chief and

his men had slept for but one hour during the past twenty-four, and were too tired to attempt a crossing. They formed a zariba on a stretch of dry ground about half a mile from the river, intending to continue the march next day towards their stronghold beyond the hills. Tom was again carefully tended by Mahmoud the hakim, and, thanks to his fine constitution, was steadily gaining strength.

Next morning, just as the Arabs were breaking up camp, one of the scouts who had already been sent across the river returned with the news that, some distance beyond the farther bank, he had descried from an eminence a body of about a hundred men in uniform preparing to march. They were commanded by a white officer. The question naturally flashed into Mustapha's mind: "Could they be a part of the British force sent out in search of the missing officer?" He had already heard, from one or two late stragglers from the force which had engaged Captain Lister, of the rockets sent up and the bugles sounded when darkness had fallen after the fight, and he had no stomach for encountering a vengeful search-party. The force just discovered, it was true, was in a quarter where the British were little to be expected, but it was well to be on the safe side. Hoping that his troops had not yet been seen, and that if they had been seen they would be mistaken in the distance for a peaceful caravan, the Arab determined on a strategic move. Instead of crossing the river, and thus coming upon the other force at an acute angle, he moved off in a north-easterly direction, as though making for the south-eastern corner of Lake Albert Edward, leaving a few trusty scouts to watch the movements of the unknown troops. But this was only a feint. After marching for a few miles he swung round suddenly to the south-east, cut across the track of his previous day's march, pressed on rapidly over the swampy ground, and struck the Rutchuru some ten miles from his first position, the river bending there almost due east. There he crossed, and, finding a stretch of comparatively clear and level ground between the forest and the hills, he halted his men, to rest them after their forced march.

Not many minutes afterwards a scout came up at full speed to say that the unknown force was following hot-foot at their heels, and taking a more direct line, having evidently divined the object of the trick. The news was hardly out of his mouth when another scout followed and informed the chief that the pursuing force was composed of Bangala, and was unmistakeably Belgian, and not British. Mustapha smiled grimly. His four hundred Arabs were a match, he thought, for a body of Bangala of one fourth that number, and rather than run the risk of being dogged and harassed, he determined to chance a fight. Sending his transport on in advance, under an escort of fifty Arabs and a crowd of negroes, he proceeded to prepare a hot welcome for his pursuers.

He knew every inch of the ground. Between his halting-place and the foot of the hills intervened a swamp some two miles long and half a mile broad. It was

crossed by two paths, one leading straight to the hills, the other intersecting the first at right angles about a quarter of a mile from the outer edge of the swamp. The whole region was mere mud and water, except along the paths, with elephant-grass at least twelve feet high standing up in all directions.

Mustapha made his dispositions rapidly. He posted a hundred of his men on the second and shorter path, about two hundred yards to the left of the main path, at a spot where they were absolutely concealed by tall grass. At the farther end of the main path he placed another hundred, with orders to offer a feeble resistance to the Belgian troops, and to retire before them into a dense copse at the base of the hills. A third hundred were stationed some three hundred yards north, at the edge of the swamp, on a line curving to the east, so that they commanded the right flank of the advancing force. These positions had hardly been taken up when the Belgian scouts, having crossed the river, advanced cautiously to the edge of the swamp and began to move forward along the main path. Just as they came to the crossways they caught sight of a few Arabs retiring in their immediate front, these having been instructed so to do in order to lure them on. The plan worked perfectly. Not troubling to examine the crosspaths, they returned with the information that the Arabs were retreating to the hills, obviously desirous of avoiding an engagement. The Belgian commandant, who had arrived but recently from Europe and was burning to distinguish himself in the pursuit of raiders, ordered his men to press forward rapidly. The Bangala advanced in single file, their commandant at their head, between hedges of grass, sometimes in their haste slipping knee-deep into the swamp.

They came in sight of the end of the path, and were met by a few shots from the Arabs there assembled, who then retired in apparent trepidation. At the same time the Arabs stationed to the north opened a brisk fire on the Bangala's right flank, to which they replied vigorously, but ineffectively, for the grass was too high to allow them to see the enemy or take careful aim. The commandant, at the head of the column, ordered a halt, and was amazed now to hear shots in his rear. The Arabs posted on the crosspath had begun to fire on the rear of the slender column. Fearing for his transport, which he had left under a small guard at the edge of the swamp, the commandant made the fatal mistake of ordering a retreat. His men turned about and began to run back. Meanwhile the Arabs behind them had come from their place of concealment and taken up their position at the crossways on both sides of the path, and those at the other end, who had pretended to retire, returned in brisk pursuit. Caught between two fires, the Bangala were thrown into a panic. The commandant was hit, and speared as he lay; his men, paralysed with fright, either stood until they were shot down, or plunged into the swamp and met their death in the ooze.

Mustapha, with grim exultation in his face, then swept down upon the

feebly-defended transport. The Bangala, after firing one shot, threw down their arms and begged for mercy. They were given a choice between instant death and slavery; and in the upshot, when the Arab chief continued his journey westward, he was richer by the whole of the Belgian baggage and a slave-gang of twenty Bangala, with as many more negro carriers.

Tom in his litter had been sent forward with Mahmoud the physician and the Arab baggage. At the sound of firing his heart leapt with the thought that it was perhaps his uncle who had overtaken the Arabs. The watchful hakim observed his excitement, and dashed his hopes with a shake of the head. At that moment a slug, shot from who knows where, dropped within a yard of Tom's litter. The Arab started and let fall an exclamation in German.

"Do you know German?" asked Tom eagerly in the same language. He felt quite friendly towards the grave hakim with the high narrow forehead and the long straggling beard.

"Yes, a little," said the Arab in surprise. "I lived a long time in Bagamoyo, when the Germans first came, and I have learned to speak a little in their infidel tongue."

"I can't tell you how glad I am. I've been longing to have someone to talk to now that I am getting better. Who is firing away over there?"

"Belgians."

"Oh!" Tom looked glum, and the Arab's lips wore a queer little smile.

"You may give up hope of rescue," continued the Arab. "We are miles and miles away from your friends, and they would never find you."

"What am I to expect, then? Better shoot me at once--if they think of keeping me as a prisoner."

"You have rich friends, no doubt; they will pay."

"Ransom! Much I'm worth! What are you taking me right away from my friends for, then?"

The Arab shrugged.

"You can judge," he said.

And indeed, when Tom thought of it, he saw that the chief was wise in seeking his remote and inaccessible stronghold before opening communications with the British authorities.

It took two days to reach the village appointed by the chief as the rendezvous for his scattered force. Tom was carried all the way in the litter, the hakim refusing to allow him yet to try to walk. They talked together in German, but though the Arab spoke freely enough about things in general, giving the captive many bits of curious and interesting information, he was very reserved on all matters relating to the chief's aims and plans and movements.

On reaching the village the chief announced his intention of remaining there

for three days, to give his friends and allies ample time for rejoining him. From the hut in which the hakim had fixed his quarters Tom had a clear view through the village. He saw a scene which haunted his memory and imagination for many a long day. Within a fence of banana stalks stood a series of low sheds, many lines deep. Between them, and around, were packed rows upon rows of naked negroes, standing, lying stretched upon the ground, or moving about in utter listlessness. Young men, women, children, all, save the very youngest, were chained and fettered; their necks were encircled with iron rings, through which a chain passed, binding the wretched creatures together in gangs of twenty. Tom saw one man raise his hand to his neck to ease it of the galling band; another, worn to a skeleton, lay panting his life out by a heap of filth; two tiny black boys were innocently playing with the links of the chain that bound their mother to other women. The look of agony and despair upon the faces of the grown slaves, still more the happy unconsciousness of the little children, touched Tom to the heart, and there and then he vowed, if in God's providence he ever escaped from that place of horror, to do all in his power to help stamp out the cruel trade. He poured out his indignation in fierce words to the Arab, who smiled and shrugged, remarking simply, "Allah is good." Tom tried to reason with him, but found him absolutely incapable even of understanding what the pother was about. "There always had been slaves, there always would be slaves; Allah is good."

Tom turned away, impatient and sick at heart. His eye fell on an adjacent enclosure, in which the relics of innumerable raids lay scattered or heaped up in profusion. Drums, spears, swords, assegais, bows and arrows, knives, ivory horns, ivory pestles, wooden idols, the wardrobes and paraphernalia of sorcerers, baskets, pots, hammers--thousands of things, useful and useless, bore witness to the Arabs' depredations. As he looked, a picture seemed to form itself in his mind. Through the darkness of night he sees stealthy, long-robed forms creep towards a sleeping village; no sound issuing from the gloom save the drowsy hum of cicadas or the croak of distant frogs; when suddenly the glare of torches gleams upon the huts, the thatch bursts into flame, and the scared sleepers wake amid the rattle of musketry, some to meet swift death with momentary pain, others--alas! the youngest, the strongest--to wear out their lives in the lingering death of slavery. Tom brushed his hands over his eyes, and begged the impassive Arab to take him away.

On the third morning of his stay in the village Tom observed that the chief was in a towering rage. He asked the physician, as the caravan again moved out westward, what was the cause of his master's disturbance. Mahmoud refused to explain. The truth was that one of the scouts despatched by the chief to the scene of his fight with Major Burnaby had returned with the news that he had discovered, on the bluff, the corpses of eight of the nine men placed there to hurl

down the logs. Up to that moment the chief had been entirely at a loss to account for the failure of the ambush so carefully arranged, and had only nursed vague suspicions. But the fact that the ambush had failed, as now reported, in the very first detail, coupled with the nonappearance of De Castro, whom he had expected to join him immediately after the battle, convinced the chief that he had been betrayed, and by his supposed friend, the Portuguese. Chewing the bitter cud of his wrath, Mustapha ordered his men to set off early in the morning, including in the caravan six hundred of the slaves.

Tom was no longer borne in a litter. The hakim had declared him well enough to walk. He was provided with a linen turban to protect his head, and with a gourd and wallet to hold water and food for the day. That he was a prisoner was left in no doubt by the guard of six men, armed with loaded rifles, who marched with him, three in front and three behind. The six were changed every three hours, a precaution against any attempt on Tom's part to become too friendly with his guards, unnecessary in the circumstances, for when, from sheer tedium, he ventured to address a few words to them, they shook their heads in unfeigned ignorance of his meaning.

Indignant as he had been at the sight of the herded slaves in the village, his blood boiled at the scenes which met his gaze during the march, and his fingers itched to get to grips with the slave-traders. "If I were only Hercules, or Samson, or any of the fabled giants of old!" he sighed, chafing at his impotence. The slaves were driven on without remorse or ruth, the heavy whip descending upon their shoulders or curling about their loins at any sign of lagging. Mothers carried their babies till they collapsed from exhaustion, strong youths fell, utterly spent, by the path-side. Some of the weaklings were butchered as they lay, the rest were left to die of famine, or perchance to be enslaved again if haply some Good Samaritan found them and nursed them back to strength.

Besides these actual evidences of present cruelty, the path itself bore witness to savageries in the past. Leading, like all native paths, up hill and down dale, crossing rocky uplands or traversing dense forests, it had been trodden with no attempt to find the easiest way, sometimes winding like a snake where a straight course would have saved miles, sometimes making a straight line up a precipitous ascent where a circular route would have been more expeditious. If a tree had fallen across it the obstruction was not removed, but a new path was trodden round it, joining the original path again at a point beyond. At more than one spot Tom saw a skeleton across the track, and there the path made a little divergence of two or three yards, returning to its course at the same distance on the other side. In answer to Tom's question the hakim told him that if a man died on the road he was never buried, but left to the beasts of the field and the fowl of the air. The loop formed by the path about the body remained for ever, though the obstacle

in course of time disappeared. Several of the grisly skeletons there encountered had the iron rings still about their necks; and with each, fuel was added to Tom's wrath, and strength to his resolve.

Towards noon, on the second day after leaving the slave-village, Tom, marching among his guards, felt more than usually dejected in spirit. He held his head high, and preserved an undaunted mien before the Arabs, but in reality he was beginning to despair of ever beholding England and his friends again. For one thing, he was physically out of sorts; the villages in which the long caravan encamped at night were not models of cleanliness, and he was sometimes too sick to swallow the unsavoury foods provided for him. Moreover, he had been terribly plagued with the jiggers, the scourge of African travel,--insects which pierced the skin and laid their eggs beneath it, these in their turn becoming worms that caused intolerable pain and irritation.

Towards noon, then, when he was feeling particularly unhappy, he observed signs of commotion in the column ahead. The chief, posted upon an ant-hill, was looking eagerly into the distance at a group of men whom he had descried upon the sky-line a mile away. He ordered the caravan to halt, and, suspecting from the smallness of the group that it might be the advance scouts of another force led by Europeans, he despatched fifty of his men to reconnoitre. They divided into two equal bands, and went off through the bush on either side of the path so as to surround the little party, and, if it proved hostile, to cut off its retreat.

Mustapha, in the meantime, collected the best of his fighting-men around him, and waited intently for his scouts to reach the strangers, who had halted upon an eminence and seemed to be hesitating whether to advance or to retire. But after a short period of indecision the group moved slowly towards the halted caravan. It proved, as it came more distinctly into view, to consist of ten men, all fully armed. They were soon met by the Arab scouts, with whom they exchanged, not shots, but friendly greetings, and who turned and escorted them towards the caravan. As they approached, something in the bearing of the leader seemed familiar to Tom, and it was with a thrill almost of dismay that he recognized him, a hundred yards away, as indubitably his old enemy, De Castro.

It was a different De Castro, however, from the brisk and alert pursuer whose clutches he had so narrowly escaped. The Portuguese was haggard and worn; his self-confidence had vanished; his clothes were in tatters; even his green coat was sober and subdued, for constant exposure to the sun had bleached it to a dirty gray. His hunt for the Arab had evidently been particularly arduous, and there was no eagerness in his tone as he greeted his friend Mustapha.

Tom had been watching the chief, and wondering at the ominous scowl that darkened his face, growing ever blacker as the Portuguese drew nearer. To De Castro's greeting the Arab replied with a curse; then turning, he gave a sharp word

of command. Twenty of his men sprang forward, and the wayworn new-comers were disarmed in a twinkling, standing helpless with dull amazement. A change instantly came over the attitude of the surrounding Arabs, the ready smile of welcome gave place to a dark scowl, and many a forefinger moved suggestively to the trigger. The Portuguese, after the first shock of surprise, gave vent to a torrent of indignant remonstrance, to which the chief turned a deaf ear; whereupon De Castro, with a shrug that seemed to say: "He's in one of his tempers", held his peace, and accepted the situation with stoical indifference.

Tom, in the meantime, had watched the scene with curious eyes, careful to keep out of the man's sight. "Strange," he thought, "that both of us, after our former tussle, should be prisoners in the same hands!" When the march was resumed, the Portuguese was sent forward under surveillance to the head of the column, Tom being nearer the centre, puzzled beyond measure at the incivility with which the chief had received one supposed to be bound to him by special ties.

Camp was pitched that night at the verge of the forest, in a deserted and half-ruined village, the stockade of which was broken down at many points of its circumference. Tom, in charge of the hakim, was located in a hut near the centre of the village, some distance from that appropriated by the chief. The chief's hut was the principal habitation, but it was little less ruinous than the rest. The thatch was broken in places, and there were two apertures in the walls wide enough to admit a full-grown man. It was overshadowed by a large and bushy tree, one of whose branches, springing from the trunk some fourteen feet from the ground, and bending down under its weight of foliage, overhung the roof, actually grazing it as the freshening breeze swayed the bough.

Tom, reclining on the grass before the hakim's hut, to eat his evening meal in the cool air before turning in, saw the Portuguese led under guard into the presence of the chief. In a few moments the sun went down, but Tom still sat, wondering what was going on at the interview. Once he thought he heard the sound of angry voices raised in altercation, but in the absence of the moon he saw nothing more, and by and by re-entered the hut, and sought the rough blanket that formed his only bed. At first he could not sleep for thinking over the, to him, unexpected arrival of the Portuguese. "It bodes no good to me," he thought. "Things are bad enough, but may easily be made worse. That villain will tell how I treated him; how he saw me afterwards with his runaway boy on the track of the expedition; that it must have been through our information the ambush came to grief. Heavens! what's to be the end of it all?" More than once during the march he had had thoughts of attempting to escape, but he had barely recovered his full vigour, and not the shadow of an opportunity had as yet presented itself. He pondered and pondered until his anxieties were drowned in quiet sleep.

It seemed but a minute later, it was in reality an hour, when he was awak-

ened by the glare of a torch held close to his face. The smell of the pitch-soaked tow clung to him for months afterwards. Dazed at first, he soon made out the swarthy features of the Portuguese behind the torch, and met his keen eyes peering closely at his own. The Portuguese clicked his tongue, and uttered an exclamation of gleeful and vindictive satisfaction. Turning to the Arab chief, who stood behind, just within the doorway, he cried in Arabic:

"It is the very man!"

Tom lay watching. Now that a crisis was manifestly at hand, his tremors had ceased; his very life depended on his coolness and nerve. De Castro had begun an impassioned speech to the grave Arab. If Tom could have understood it, he would have heard him say:

"You charge me, forsooth, with being a traitor, with betraying you to the English--me, De Castro, the best hater of the English in all Africa! There you have the man who spoilt your game--our game. Man, I call him--that cub yonder, who tricked my boy away from me, and paid him, no doubt, to spy on me!"

("Wonder if he's telling the chief how I punched him!" thought Tom, noting the gleam and gesture of anger in his direction.)

"And you talk of accepting a ransom for him! Bah! 'tis the idea of a white-livered fool! Ransom! Mustapha, you were not always like this. Once upon a time you would have been hot for revenge--your wrath would have been satisfied ere the sun went down. Now you will sit supine after a shameful defeat, and take its price in gold!"

The Arab winced under the sting, and Tom saw him scowl as he laid his hand on his scimitar. He was beginning to speak, but the Portuguese gave him no time.

"Threats! I care not a straw for your threats. Come, Mustapha, do not let us quarrel. Think! Who was it started this parrot-cry, 'Down with the slave-trade'? Who was it stopped the raids for ivory, and hounded your people out of their ancient haunts till they have no rest now for the soles of their feet? Who was it strewed the sands of Egypt with thousands of your kin who were struggling in Allah's name to rescue the country from the Ottoman tyrant? You know who. We have had enough of these accursed English in Africa. But for them the Arabs would have been masters of the continent from Zanzibar to the Atlantic, from Tanganyika to the Great Sea. Bad enough, the swines of Belgians; but they can be bought. You can't buy these insolent dogs of English! Will you be deafened by their barking, and lacerated by their bites? Do you, like a poltroon, throw up the game? If not, let there be no talk of ransom, no faltering; let it be blood for blood, till Africa is our own again."

The Portuguese had waxed more and more vehement, but Tom was cool enough to look on critically as at an oratorical performance, and he even smiled

the usual British smile at the fervid, unrestrained eloquence of the Southern races. De Castro went on in calmer accents:

"Come, Mustapha, your men will think you afraid to touch a white man if you allow this bear's whelp to be bought off. They will say: 'Give Mustapha so many gold pieces, and you may draw his teeth!' My friend, hand the cub over to me. I will make an example of him for his countrymen to shiver at!"

The taunts, even more than the arguments, of the Portuguese had roused the cruelty in the Arab's nature.

"Do as you like with him," he said impulsively. "It will teach them a lesson. I can trust you, no doubt, señor," he went on with a half-sneer, "not to let him off too easily. As for me, I have no taste for butchering curs; I prefer to employ others."

The Portuguese glared for an instant, but, too glad to get the long-coveted prey into his own hands, he pocketed the affront.

"So be it. To-morrow's sun will see what shall be done with him. Meanwhile, haul the dog from his kennel. Why give him a comfortable hut? Treat him like the rest."

The chief nodded. The Portuguese went to the door and called in three of the usual guard of six.

"Here, men," he said, "the chief orders you to remove this prisoner. Take him and tie him to yonder tree, and see to it that he does not escape."

As the men approached, Tom sprang to his feet and prepared to resist any handling by the Arabs. At this moment the hakim, who had stood in a corner of the hut, came forward and spoke a few words in the chief's ear. But they seemed only to strengthen the Arab's resolve. He bluntly told the physician to mind his own business,--that his intervention was vain. By this time Tom saw that resistance was hopeless; a struggle would probably end in his being butchered; and while there was life there was hope. He suffered himself to be led out. The Portuguese himself superintended the tying-up, the tree being the stout acacia shading the chief's hut. Eight men were set to watch the prisoner during the rest of the night, and with a look of malignant satisfaction in his evil face, the Portuguese, no longer suspected or distrusted, repaired, a free man, to his own quarters.

CHAPTER IX

Gone Away!

Through the Net--A Call in Passing--A Chase in the Dark--On the Track--Signals--The Little People--Ka-lu-ké-ke--Visions of the Night

It was desperately cold. Since he had left Kisumu, Tom had spent every night under a blanket, and, standing now with his back to the tree, a rope about his waist, another about his legs, a third tying his arms, he had nothing to defend him from the keen air but the clothes he stood in, and was unable to gain warmth by movement. He chafed under this bitter constraint; tried the strength of the ropes by straining at them with all his might; gave up the effort in sheer impotence, and wondered whether he should live to see another dawn.

"The blackguards!" he said to himself. A whimsical smile twitched his lips as he caught sight of the eight men set to watch him, squatting around a fire some distance away, and beguiling the time with a game somewhat resembling knuckle-bones. He fixed his eyes on the fire, following the leaping flames, indulging his fancy in imaging strange monstrous shapes; then recalled chestnut nights by the big-room fire at school; by and by found himself whistling "Follow up" and "Forty years on", at which the watchers dropped their dice and their talk for a moment and turned their listening faces towards him. Then the numbing cold began its soporific work. He felt dazed; fantastic visions danced before his eyes. Presently his lips moved without his knowing it, framing foolish remarks at which it seemed that another self was laughing; then his head bent forward, and he slept.

Somewhere about midnight it seemed to him in a dream that water was trickling down his neck. He awoke and threw back his head and hitched his shoulders, and felt that it was not water but something sinuous and solid, caught between tie back of his head and his coat collar. While he was wondering whether a snake had sought refuge there from the cold, he felt the intruder withdrawn, or rather was conscious that he had jerked his head away from it. The next moment the cold thin line, of he knew not what, wandered round and tickled his nose. Again he moved his head away. Now fully awake, he concluded that a strand of some creeping plant was dangling from the tree, and hoped forlornly that his discomfort, already not far short of actual torture, was not to be increased in any such irritating manner. He could not bend low enough to scratch his nose. The detestable thing seemed to follow him. He might move his head to left or to right, jerk it back or bend it forward, but he could not avoid the persistent tickler, which he had now recognized by the wan light of the moon, in her fourth quarter and sailing high, as the leafless tendril of a creeper.

He was tempted to call out to the watchers, and ask them to relieve him of this torment. But at the same moment he noticed that the eight negroes about the smouldering fire had dropped their heads on their knees, and that the creeper was

swinging to and fro with a regular pendulum movement that was hardly natural, and was certainly not due to the wind, which blew fitfully in sudden gusts. It flashed upon him that somebody, perhaps the hakim, was up the tree, signalling to him. Bending his head back as far as he could, he peered up into the branches. At the same instant, the dangling switch ascended before his eyes; he gazed more intently, and by the faint glow of the fire from below, rather than by the filtering rays from the moon, he distinguished a crouching form at the fork of bough and trunk. It might have been an animal, but while Tom was still gazing up in a kind of dull amazement the form moved, a human arm was stretched downward, and within the grasp of a human hand a long blade caught a glint of red light from the watchers' fire. Tom longed to snatch at it. There it was, three feet above his head! He tore desperately at his fastenings, but the cords only cut into his flesh. "Come down and cut me free!" he whispered; but just then one of the Manyema turned his head, the knife was instantly withdrawn, the figure crawled back upon the branch, and disappeared from view.

Tom wondered. Surely the hakim, if it was the hakim, was not going to desert him. He waited and fretted; minute after minute passed; there was no sound, no sign. His heart sank; somnolence was again creeping over his senses when, nearly an hour after he had been first awaked, he heard a faint rustle in the tree above him. He looked up; there again was the form, its features indistinguishable in the foliage. As he gazed he saw a rod let down; the long knife was swathed about the end. It came lower; it reached the level of his hands, and stopped. He looked at it with wonder; then from the tree came a whisper:

"Cut; quick!"

He almost laughed at the absurdity of the suggestion. His hands were tied; his arms were bent in front of his chest, elbows and palms together, and strong cords were wound tightly about the wrists and forearms. But there was the sharp blade turned towards him, within half an inch of the ropes, held stiffly as though some malicious elf were bent on tantalizing him. Again came the eager whisper:

"Cut, cut; up and down, up and down!"

The knife moved closer, it touched the rope about his wrists; he felt its pressure. Was the thing possible? He tried to pull his cramped arms apart, and found that, firmly as they were bound, he could move them up and down for about an inch. He made a downward movement, the ropes scraping against the blade; up again, then down, again, again, with increasing rapidity as his excitement grew. One of the guards heaved a great sigh; Tom instantly stopped rubbing, and when the negro turned sleepily to look at the prisoner, he saw him tied to the tree, his head bent on his chest, his eyes closed. The man stretched out his arms, shifted his position, and gave himself again to slumber. Then the knife moved again, the rubbing was resumed; one strand gave way, then another, the tension was slackened,

and with one final wrench Tom found his aching hands free!

He pressed them under his armpits to warm them and remove something of the pain; but the figure above was impatient, insistent. He lowered the knife still farther, and pressed it against the rope around Tom's waist. Tom took it. A few moments' sawing severed that rope also; then he stooped to his feet, and with three sharp strokes upon the cords about his ankles his last bonds were snapped, and he stood once more a free man. The negroes still slept, and the fire had died down upon its embers.

What was he now to do? Who was his obliging friend? He had little time to wonder; the rod was withdrawn into the tree; a few moments later it came down--the knife was gone.

"Climb up, sah!" came the eager whisper.

Tom grasped the rod, set his feet upon the knobby bole, and with exertions which strained the muscles of arms and legs to the verge of cramp he heaved himself into the leafy bough. The figure there clutched him as he was on the point of falling. "Sah! sah!" it said with a sob of joy. Tom gripped Mbutu's hand, and sat for a minute breathless, peering down towards the circle of sleeping negroes. The wind blew with increasing force, rustling the leaves, and the branch swayed heavily, grazing the hut's thatched roof.

"No time fink, sah," said Mbutu. "Must run away!"

But now that he was free Tom had recovered his wits, and saw that if he was to get clear away he must exercise all his cunning. There was the hut in which the chief, his enemy, lay; there were the guards, sleeping, it was true, but likely to wake at any moment. Around was the village, filled with Arabs, Manyema, and slaves; an alarm would set hundreds of men on the alert, and there was but a slender chance of escaping from so many. Beyond the village, three hundred yards away, was the thin outer belt of the forest; could he but gain that, Tom thought, he might hide and elude pursuit. There was danger from wild beasts, no doubt; but a wild beast was less dangerous than the vengeful Portuguese. It must be a dash for life and liberty, he saw. How was he to escape immediate danger of detection?

His quick eye noticed that Mbutu wore the burnous and turban of an Arab. With a leaping heart he saw in a flash of thought his way made plain. It involved manifold risks. "Never venture never win," he said to himself, and proceeded to put his plan into operation. Tying the knife again to the rod, but at an angle to form a crook, he let it down, and hooked up the severed cords that lay at the foot of the tree. He swiftly knotted them to form two strong ropes. Then bidding Mbutu secure the knife and follow him, he crept cautiously along the bough towards the hut. The wind was stiffening to a gale; the horned moon was dipping behind the forest, and the hut lay in shadow. He came to the end of the branch, and crawled

on to the roof, Mbutu following close. Moving only when the swaying bough rustled against the thatch, drowning all other sounds, he made his way cat-like across the roof, reached the edge, slid over, and slipped noiselessly down one of the wooden posts supporting the thatch at the distance of a foot from the wall of the hut. He was on the ground on the side farthest from the tree. For some moments he stood and listened. There was a sound of voices not far to his right, and he thought he detected a low murmur from two or three quarters. Evidently there were many still awake. Tom decided that the plan he had formed offered a better chance of escape than a mere dash for the forest. Taking off the turban with which he had been provided by the hakim, he opened it out, and folded the sheet of linen over and over until it made a long tight roll. In a few whispered words he explained his plan to Mbutu; then, signing to the boy to come after him quietly, he crept through one of the holes in the wall, and found himself inside the hut. On a rude table a small rushlight was burning, by whose glimmer he saw the chief stretched upon his back on a narrow plank, his burnous cast aside, his long form covered with a red blanket. He was fast asleep, with his mouth open, his breath coming and going with long soundless heaves. With heart beating violently in spite of himself, Tom stole behind the Arab, and then whispered to Mbutu that he was to hold the man's head when he gave the signal. Both then stooped; Tom gave a nod; Mbutu pressed the chief's head down firmly with both hands, and at the same instant Tom stuffed the rolled turban into his mouth, and knotted it beneath his neck. He wriggled and half rose upon his elbow; instantly Mbutu's arms were thrown around him, and he was pulled backward and held in a firm grip. Tom had meanwhile run to his feet, and, whipping one of the lengths of cord from his pocket, he swiftly tied the chief's ankles together. Now that it was impossible for the Arab to stand, Tom bade Mbutu assist him. There was a short struggle, the Arab striving to wriggle out of Mbutu's grasp. It was in vain; with the remaining cord Tom bound the Arab's arms together, and in five minutes after their entrance the chief lay securely gagged and bound.

Without losing a moment Tom donned the Arab's burnous and turban.

"Do you know the nearest way to the forest?" he asked Mbutu.

The Muhima nodded, and Tom told him that, relying upon his disguise, he was going to walk boldly through the camp. If they met anyone, Mbutu was to address him in his own tongue in such a way as to disarm suspicion. Tom reckoned on his own height to enable him to pass for the chief. There was a box of matches by the rushlight; he put that in his pocket, caught up a small bag of nuts that lay beside the Arab, and without bestowing another glance on the prostrate form, whose eyes were glaring at him with all the fury of impotent rage, he walked slowly out of the hut, Mbutu a yard behind.

They went quickly, stepping in the shade of the huts. Their way led past

the hut in which the Portuguese was sleeping. The African native is sensitive to the slightest tremor of the ground, and one of the negroes who had accompanied De Castro, and was acting as sentry over him, crouching over a watch-fire, heard the footfall of the two fugitives, and came round the hut towards them. He dimly saw, as he supposed, the tall form of the Arab chief stalking by, accompanied by one of his men. He stepped back, and at the same moment Mbutu, with a power of mimicry that surprised his master, addressed him in a few quiet words, bidding him keep good watch over the señor, while Tom walked on with a dignified air, as though the negro were beneath his notice. When out of the man's sight they quickened their steps. They reached the outer circle of huts, evaded the watch-fires placed at intervals, crossed the fence and ditch, and, breaking into a run, plunged into the dense bush at the edge of the compound. The fugitives had barely gone two hundred yards when they heard a great outcry in the camp behind. One of the eight guards had awoke and rekindled the dying fire. Glancing at the tree, he discovered that the prisoner was gone. He roused his companions, and with mutual upbraidings they began to dispute who should venture to inform the chief of the escape. Their voices rose in altercation, and De Castro's sentry, hearing the noise, came to see what had happened. As soon as he knew that the Englishman had escaped, he ran to his master's hut, whence in a moment issued the Portuguese, swearing great oaths at being disturbed when he so much needed rest, and for the moment not understanding what his man said. A glance at the tree apprised him that his anticipated victim had escaped his clutches. Heedless of the news that the chief had but just before been seen walking through the camp, he rushed to the hut, and finding Mustapha there bound and gagged, began with frantic haste and fearful imprecations, in which he could not refrain from mingling taunts, to cut him free. Both men were beside themselves with fury. The whole camp was by this time alarmed, and Arabs and Manyema alike cowered before the wrath of their infuriated superiors. De Castro ran wildly about crying for torches, while Mustapha ordered every man in the camp to set off in search of the escaped prisoner, and despatched parties in all directions. He went himself to the hakim's hut, believing that the Arab seen walking in the prisoner's company must be Mahmoud and no other. Meeting the grave physician as he came out to enquire the reason of the uproar, the chief roundly accused him of effecting or conniving at the release of the Englishman. The hakim's face showed neither surprise nor pleasure; he was as coldly imperturbable as ever. Quietly denying that he had had any hand in the escape, he asked the Arab what he expected to gain by wild ill-directed searches in the dark; the torches and the din would only give warning to the fugitives, and help them to elude pursuit. Mustapha saw the absurdity of his proceedings, and chafed under the cynical scorn of the physician, whose calling and character enforced his unwilling respect. Turning on his heel,

he ordered drums to be beaten to recall the search-parties, and enquiry to be made for the traitor in the camp; and when De Castro came up to him, foaming with passion and shouting that the whole thing had been planned to spite him, Mustapha bade him keep a still tongue in his head, or he would find himself in the Englishman's place. It wanted still more than three hours to sunrise, and giving orders that the search should be diligently resumed at dawn, the chief returned to his hut.

In the meantime the outcry had at first caused the fugitives to hasten their steps; but, fearing that the rustle and crash of their progress through the bush would arrest the pursuers' attention, they dropped behind a fallen tree. Not many minutes afterwards a party of Manyema who had outstripped the rest, keeping close together in their mutual fear, came within a few yards of Tom's hiding-place. There was one moment of suspense, then they passed on with torches burning; but soon the tap-tap of the recalling drums sounded through the wood, and they turned, passed within a few paces of where the panting fugitives lay crouched, and retraced their steps to the camp.

"All go back, sah!" whispered Mbutu gleefully. "No catch dis night. All jolly safe now, sah."

"I hope so," said Tom. "It was a narrow shave, Mbutu. We'll wait till all is quiet, and consider what we had better do."

"Must go on, sah; black men gone; rest by and by; time fink by and by."

They rose and pursued their way into the forest, picking their steps as best they could in the increasing darkness, among trees, profuse grass, and creeping plants that threw their sprays in intricate mazes across their path. When they had gone about a mile from the camp the forest became so thick that it was impossible to proceed farther that night. Mbutu suggested that they should climb a tree as the best protection from prowling beasts, and wait until morning. To this Tom agreed, and finding a trunk easy to climb, they got up into its lower branches, and made themselves as comfortable as possible. Their ascent caused a commotion among the feathered denizens of their shelter, and Mbutu declared he heard the gibber of a monkey angry at the disturbance of his ancestral home; but they rested without molestation till the dawn sent feeble glimmers through the foliage, and during that time Mbutu told his story.

His master's disappearance, he said, had caused the utmost consternation and distress to the whole force. After some hours of fruitless search next morning, the major had sorrowfully decided that he must complete the object of his expedition, leaving all further efforts to find Tom until his work was done. Promising, then, a rich reward to any native who should give him information as to the young man's fate, he had continued his march, and arriving at the native chief's village, after a stubborn fight had burnt it to the ground. Most of the inhabitants fled,

among them the chief. The major then returned rapidly over his tracks, and spent several days in searching far and wide through the country. Mbutu, meanwhile, had felt sure from the very first that his master was not dead, and had accompanied the expedition in the hope that ere long some trace of him would be found. Then, giving up hope of this, and learning that the major had decided to return to Kisumu, he had resolved to go on the search alone. Slipping away from the column soon after it passed the scene of the ambush, he had cut into the woods, and coming upon the dead bodies of Arabs, he had, as a measure of precaution, appropriated the burnous and turban of one of them. Then he sought for the trail of the retreating Arabs, believing that his master was among them. Fortunately they had marched in almost a straight line, so that he tracked them easily until he came to the river where they had sighted the Belgians, and there he was for a time at fault. But he encountered a native, who informed him of the sharp fight at the swamp, and put him on the right track again. Two days before he arrived at the camp he had descried the caravan, and from that moment he dogged it patiently and warily, at one point of the route creeping up so close that he was able to see, from the shelter of a bushy tree, the figure of his master among the Manyema guard. Then he followed up more cautiously than ever, in the hope of discovering some means of effecting the prisoner's release. No opportunity had offered, and his heart sank when he saw the Portuguese join the caravan, still more when, as he peered from a safe hiding-place among the trees, he saw the Arab chief accompany De Castro to the hut where Tom lay. The tying-up had made him desperate. He had thought at first of creeping up and cutting his master free, but every time he took a step forward towards the tree one of the guard moved, or some noise had startled him, as a mouse peeping out from its hole is startled by the faintest sound of movement. Then he had the happy thought to climb the tree, and endeavour to cut his master's bonds from above. The discovery that he could not reach was at first agony, but he was strung up to a pitch of desperation that set all his wits on the alert. He had crept back into the forest and cut the rod to which he had tied the knife; and now, with touching earnestness, he assured his master that he would never leave him until he was once more safe among his own people.

"Poor old Uncle," said Tom, when Mbutu had ended his story; "how I wish I could let him know I am alive and well and free! And you, Mbutu, how am I to thank you for your faithful service? I can tell you this: that when I do see my friends again, you shall not be forgotten, my boy. But where are we? What are we to do? Do you know anything about this part of the country?"

"Yes, sah; know lot, sah. Forest ober dar, ober dar, ober dar."

He pointed successively in three directions--north, south, and west.

"Then we must go to the east, eh?--the other way, you know."

"No, sah, nebber do; all Arab dat way."

And then he went on to explain that the open country through which the Arab caravan had lately been travelling was the last clear stretch by which their stronghold could be reached. It was wedge-shaped, narrowing as it became engulfed in the forest. The few natives whose hamlets were dotted about it were all in the Arabs' pay, and were treated with special and unusual consideration, in order that they might be disposed to give early tidings of an enemy's approach. Mbutu assured his master that the Arab chief would at once acquaint the natives all through that district with his prisoner's escape and offer a reward for his capture, expecting him to make his way eastward, where every path and cross-road would be narrowly watched.

"In that case we had better strike southward into the forest," said Tom. "A pleasant prospect!" he mused. "I have some recollection of reading in one of Stanley's books about this forest: hundreds of miles long, and hundreds broad; one could drop Great Britain and Ireland into it, to say nothing of the kingdom of Man. But I suppose," he said, turning again to Mbutu, "after a time we could safely make a turn to the south-east and reach the River Rutchuru again? What about your own country, Mbutu? Couldn't we make for that?"

"'Fraid no, sah; my country days and days ober dar." He pointed to the south-west, then looked puzzled, and finally confessed that in the dark he was not quite sure of the direction. "My people all gone dead, sah; live man all stole, huts burnt in big fire. No; Mbutu no fader, no mudder, no pickin: no nuffin--only sah."

"Poor fellow! Well, I see nothing for it but to go into the forest as soon as it is light. We've nothing to keep us warm at night; no food except these nuts I brought. I have no watch and no compass: you've nothing but a knife; we're both desperately poor, Mbutu, and we'll have to live on our wits, I'm afraid.--Hark! what's that?"

The dawn came up like thunder, indeed. Through the wood resounded the thud-thud of many drums of various tones, some rattling a rapid rat-tat, others booming with deep, hollow, reverberating notes. Mbutu turned his ear towards the sound, listening with peculiar intentness for several minutes. Then he shook his head.

"Not know dat!" he said. He explained that many tribes had their own individual codes of drum-signals, which could only be recognized by their own friends. By means of these information was often telegraphed for miles in a very few minutes, the note of the drum reaching far, and being taken up and repeated from point to point. Though he had never heard these particular notes before, he surmised that the Arab chief was already signalling the escape of his prisoner. It was clearly time to be off. Slipping down from the tree, the two fugitives struck into the forest in a south-westerly direction, and were relieved to hear the drum-taps becoming ever fainter and fainter as they proceeded. When the sounds had

died away altogether, they sat down on a fallen tree and made a frugal breakfast of nuts, sipping up the gigantic beads of dew which covered the spreading leaves of plants near the ground. Then they arose and went on their way.

By this time they were well on the outskirts of the great Congo Forest, which stretches for hundreds of miles westward of Lake Albert Edward and the rivers flowing into it. Tom began to be oppressed by a sort of nightmare feeling, which damped his spirits and made him drop his voice to a whisper when he spoke to Mbutu. The silence was awful. Trees large and small, packed so close together that there seemed at a distance barely room to squeeze between them, rose up, some straight of stem, some twisted and warped, others snapped off high above the ground, their foliage interlacing and shutting off all view of sky and sun, the space beneath as dim as the aisles of some vast cathedral. From tree to tree ran huge festoons of creeper and vine, weaving intricate patterns with each other, clinging in great coils about the trunks. At every fork and on every branch huge lichens were embossed, with broad spear-leaved plants, and clusters of orchid and liana. The sodden forest floor was covered with bush and amoma, save where a group of fallen trees, split or scorched by the lightning, had made a gap and let in the sunlight, and there innumerable baby trees had sprung up, jostling each other in their eagerness to catch the stream of light and heat.

At one point Tom sat down to rest on a prostrate moss-covered trunk. It crumbled into rottenness under his weight, and, looking, he saw that it had been mined by countless termites. Red ants scurried after one another in the wrinkles of the bark, and a huge blue scorpion darted out of a hole, causing Tom to start back with loathing. Near at hand was a shallow pool, green with duckweed, its surface covered with leaves of lotus and lilies, and a green, greasy scum of microscopic plants. Above this was a crooked tree, whose trunk seemed to have broken out in great ulcerous sores, from which swollen globules of gum exuded, dropping with heavy pong into the pool. Not a sound broke the stillness; the silver trill of the mavis, the strident caw of rooks, the brisk chirp of grasshoppers, all the myriad sounds of an English wood, were absent; and Tom, gazing into the confused mass of green, his feet chilled on the spongy humus, felt that he was surrounded in very truth by death in life.

Marching on again along a narrow path which seemed a mere tunnel in the forest, Mbutu had often to use his knife to cut away obstructive growths--great sprays of thorn that grabbed at their clothes, caught them under the chin, and seemed bent on cutting their throats. Presently they came to an abandoned clearing, where the vegetation now grew more luxuriantly than ever; the charred poles of native huts covered with climbing plants of vivid green, mingled with white and purple flowers, forming bowers fit for Titania the fairy queen. Just beyond was a stream, dashing over rocks between banks covered with vegetation, some

of the larger trees bending over the current at the height of fifty feet, thus forming a huge shed beneath which hundreds of boats might have been sheltered. Here Tom got Mbutu to cut him a stout cudgel of hard wood from one of the stooping monsters, thinking it might prove useful as they progressed. The pedestrians drank their fill of the delicious water, crossed on the rocks, and forced their way up the opposite bank into the forest again. Half a mile farther on they came to a trickling stream, and beyond it, in a hollow, under a dense canopy of foliage so thick that, but for twinkling points of blue here and there, the sky was invisible, they lighted upon tiny, cage-like habitations no more than three feet high, made of sticks and leaves, and erected in a narrow clearing between clumps of gigantic trees. Mbutu stopped short and uttered a low cry of alarm, looking round with evident apprehension.

"What is it?" asked Tom in surprise, for the boy had hitherto shown himself absolutely fearless.

"Bambute, sah!" he whispered; "little tiny people, berrah tiny small. Dey shoot poison, sah: one scratch, man dead."

And Mbutu pulled his master away, and did not quit his hold until he had led him half a mile farther into the forest. He then explained that here and there, in such small clearings as they had just traversed, there dwelt little communities of strange dwarf-like people, whose naked bodies were covered with a thin down, and who lived a sort of elfin life, stealing about from glade to glade, hardly ever visible, as difficult to discover as mice in a corn-field. They were skilled in woodcraft and the chase, agile and fleet of foot, and so well versed in poisons that with their toy-like bows and arrows they could kill fowl, and men, and even elephants, with a mere scratch. They could shoot three arrows so rapidly that the last sprang from the bow before the first had reached its mark. They fed on grubs and beetles, honey, mushrooms, and roots, besides coneys and hares and other spoils of the chase, and had a sweet tooth for the potatoes and bananas cultivated by their taller neighbours. Mbutu said that he was not afraid of ordinary negroes or Arabs, they could easily be avoided; but if he and his master stumbled into a nest of dwarfs, he feared they would not escape with their lives.

At noon Tom sat down upon a recently fallen trunk to rest. Mbutu went off by himself to find food, and luckily came upon a deserted clearing where bananas were still growing. He returned with a luscious bunch, and after eating and resting a while, the travellers again resumed their march. The heat of the afternoon had brought out myriad insects that buzzed about their heads, darting in every now and then to sting. Bees, wasps, and ticks innumerable sported hither and thither across their path; sometimes a flock of pigeons would clatter out of a tree, and high over their heads shrilled the mocking notes of parrots.

As the afternoon wore on, the heat became oppressive, suffocating. An

ominous heaviness brooded over everything; the dimness deepened into darkness, and a feeling as of an approaching calamity crept over Tom. Suddenly he heard a faint rumble like artillery far away; through a narrow opening in the forest he saw a spear of white flame dart across from tree to tree; then the silent trees rustled, swayed, and smote their tops one against another like masts straining under heavy canvas in a hurricane. Then roared the thunder; forked lightning flashed pale-green across the tree-tops, and the massive trees bent and reeled like rushes, recovering themselves from the first blow, staggering forward, jerked back by the climbing plants around them, clashing, roaring, screaming like fierce savage warriors in mortal fight. Tom stood still, amazed at the wild warfare, deafened by the reverberating thunder-claps, blinded by the scathing flames of lightning, yet exhilarated as he watched the fray. Then out of the black sky poured a deluge of rain, sheet upon sheet, hissing like water poured on hot iron, every drop as large as a crown-piece, penetrating the cotton garments of the travellers, drenching them in a moment to the skin. For three minutes the torrents fell; then, as suddenly as it had begun, the storm ceased, its fury was extinguished, the sky cleared, the trees stood still, and there was nothing to mark the terrific elemental strife but the streaming foliage, the soaked ground, and two giant stems which, cleft by the lightning, had crashed down and overwhelmed many smaller trees beneath them.

"Whew! that was a storm indeed!" said Tom. "What are we to do now? We can't go on in this sopping state."

"I know, sah; climb tree, dry clothes in sun."

"A novel drying-room!" said Tom with a smile. "Well, let's try it."

The fallen trees lay across others in such a way that they formed a sort of inclined path leading from the ground up into the forks of trees still standing. Tom and the Muhima nimbly climbed up until they were almost at the top of a giant of the woods, and there they sat amid the foliage and easily dried their dripping garments in the fierce sunlight. When that was done they felt hungry, and after they had reached the ground, Mbutu found some small berries which he assured his master were perfectly good to eat. Then they went on again. It was impossible to tell how far they had come. Tom had left the direction to Mbutu, who seemed to find the way by instinct. Judging by the height of the sun that it was now about four o'clock, Tom wondered how they were to pass the approaching night. They had seen no human beings, and few living creatures at all save insects and snakes; Mbutu, indeed, assured his master that beasts of prey were not much to be dreaded in such dense forest, though he would not be surprised if an elephant should come rushing out upon them.

They were sitting at the edge of a clearing, with their backs against a huge tree, to rest for a few minutes before starting for the last hour's walk, when Mbutu

suddenly clutched Tom by the sleeve. At the same moment Tom heard a curious rhythmic chant, beginning on a low note, skipping three or four tones, and then descending to a chromatic note midway between. Then out of the forest to their left came a strange procession, a line of some thirty little naked figures, well-formed, cheerful-looking, diminutive men less than four feet high, trotting along in single file, their passage absolutely soundless save for the crooning chant in time with their footsteps. "Ka-lu-ké-ke, ka-lu-ké-ke," they sang, their voices low and pleasant and melodious, their motions lithe and graceful. They carried bows and arrows, and one, who appeared to be their chief, had a light spear in addition. Without turning their heads they rapidly crossed the glade, and disappeared like gnomes in the forest on the other side.

Mbutu heaved a sigh of relief.

"Bambute!" he said. "No see us dis time; plenty poison dem arrows."

"So those are your pigmies, eh? Upon my word, Mbutu, they looked quite an interesting lot of little fellows. I liked that song of theirs much better than the 'man all alone', you know. We have a saying in my country, 'little and good'; many a little man has been a hero. There's Bobs, you know; ever heard of Bobs? Well, I'll tell you all about him some day. I declare I'm sleepy; there's no hut for us to-night; I think we had better climb that big tree there and sleep on the lowest fork, eh?"

"All right, sah! No dago man now, sah," he added.

"That's true; but we aren't out of the wood yet! We have done well to-day, I think; now for our leafy bed."

Mbutu was asleep as soon his head touched the bough on which he had perched himself. But Tom was awake for hours, pondering on many things. The night-wind swayed the branches all around him, waking a chorus of creaking stems, swinging boughs, rustling leaves. From below came the ceaseless scraping chirp of crickets, the shrill piping call of cicadas, the tuneless croak of frogs. In the distance he heard the harsh, rasping cry of the lemur, and a strange sound like the noise of a stick rattled against iron railings; this, Mbutu explained afterwards, was a soko or chimpanzee amusing himself with striking upon a tree. Once Tom was startled by a sudden crackle, followed by a rending and rushing and a heavy thump that shook the fork on which he lay. In the morning he found that a dead tree had fallen, crashing through the forest and overwhelming many a living tree with its weight. All these sounds, breaking in upon the sad rustle of the foliage, filled Tom's soul with a sense of forlornness. By and by the sounds were unheeded; his mind was occupied with thronging memories and thoughts. He was reminded of the sleepless nights he had sometimes spent in his father's parsonage, hearkening to the rooks in the trees just opposite his window. He thought of his boyish ambitions; of the pride and eagerness with which he had

listened to his uncle Jack's stories when he came on rare visits to the parsonage; of the blow to all his hopes when his father died. Then he lived again in thought through the long months at Glasgow; heard the din of the engine-shop, and felt once more the dissatisfied longing of that dreary time. That appeared now to be far back in a dim remote past. It was only a few weeks since he had left England, and yet how much had happened in the interval! The events of years seemed to have been compressed into days. His thirst for adventure was more than satisfied; yet here he was, in the heart of an African forest, with who could tell what new experiences in store for him?

And as his mind rolled question after question round an empty ring, eerie shapes seemed to creep out of the darkness, mocking and jibing, whispering words of evil augury, prophesying comfortless days of weariness and pain, of aimless wandering in the immeasurable forest, where he would finally drop and die, a prey to jackal or vulture. He strained his eyes, as though to see if these were in very truth bodily forms surrounding him; then upon his mental sight another scene rose--reminiscences of his brief captivity with the Arabs; stark forms lying in chains upon the swampy path; men and women and children sobbing out their lives in slavery; the slaver's cruel whip descending on the backs of young boys and maidens, who writhed and shrieked and fell bleeding and exhausted, many to rise no more. His own dark fancies fled the horrors of the slave-trade came home to him. He forgot his own puny troubles, and even his present extremity. Once more he registered the vow that, if he were spared, he would strike a blow, however feeble, against this hideous traffic in humanity. Suddenly there fell upon his inward ear the cry of the Arabs in the fight by the bridge: "Allah-il-Allah! God is God!" A solemn quiet brooded upon his mind; the wind itself lulled and the rustle of the leaves around him ceased. Looking up through the canopy of green, he saw one star faintly twinkling. His depression passed away; he found himself murmuring the lines of a poem that had been a favourite with his father:

"God's in His heaven,
All's right with the world".

Thoughts of all the good things of life crowded through his mind; he felt contented and at rest; and with recollections his uncle, Dr. O'Brien, Mr. Barkworth, and the padre making a dancing medley in his brain with hippos and crocodiles, Arabs

and pigmies, he at last fell into a dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER X

The Land of the Pigmies

Slow Progress--Forest Life--Hunger--Overtures--A Change of Diet--In Straits--A Man Hunt--At Bay

Tom awoke when the darkness was fading, and a ghostly light showed him the still sleeping form of Mbutu hard by.

"Wake up, my katikiro," he said cheerily. "I shall have to teach you those lines about the sluggard, my boy. Come, what about breakfast?"

Mbutu was wide awake in an instant. He slid down the tree with the agility of a cat.

"Me get breakfast, sah," he said, "jolly good breakfast."

He was out of sight before Tom, in a more leisurely way, had descended. Soon the Muhima returned, his arms full of magnificent mushrooms. He put them down at the foot of the tree and disappeared again, this time remaining somewhat longer away, and bringing back with him some red berries of the phrynia and the oblong fruit of the amoma. Tom made a wry face as he bit one of the berries, and Mbutu laughed and explained that the kernel was the edible part; but he found the tartish amoma fruit refreshing, and of these and the mushrooms, fried over a twig fire, he made a satisfying meal. Then they started on their way, taking their direction from the rising sun, of which they caught a glimpse through the trees.

But soon the sun was hidden from their view, and they had to tunnel their way through creepers, rubber-plants, and tangled vines. The heat was like the damp heat of a hot-house many times intensified, and they sweated till they were wringing wet. Sometimes they floundered into thick scum-faced quagmires green with duckweed, into which they sank knee-deep, the stench exhaled from the slough almost overcoming Tom. Then came a new patch of thorn, which Mbutu had to cut away laboriously with his knife, Tom standing by chafing at his inability to assist. When they got through, after taking more than an hour to traverse half a mile, their clothes were in tatters, and Tom's rueful look provoked a smile from Mbutu.

"Soon get used to it, sah," he said cheerfully. "No clothes; all same for one."

"Which means, I suppose, that I'm only very much in the forest fashion!

Well, it's hot enough for anything; certainly too hot to talk. Let us rest."

"Berrah soon, sah. I see coney track; rest ober dar."

Following up the slight track which his sharp eyes had discovered, he led the way to a spot where a camp had evidently been formed not very long before. The ground was cleared, and several logs of various lengths lay about. On one of these Tom sat down thankfully to rest.

"It's time for dinner, I'm sure. I'd give anything for a glass of cider, but, as that's out of the question, can you find me some water anywhere, Mbutu?"

"Oh yes, sah; camp here, must be water."

He went into the undergrowth, and returned by and by with a broad leaf of the phrynia held cup-shape in his hands, brimming with delicious water from a rivulet. After quenching their thirst and eating a few berries they went on again.

Marching began to be monotonous. There was little variety. Sometimes they crossed the track of an elephant or a buffalo; once they came upon a stretch of fifty yards of flattened undergrowth exhaling an unpleasant musky smell, and Mbutu explained that that was the trail of a boa-constrictor. Later they crossed a track evidently made by human footsteps, and once Tom was only saved from falling into a deep elephant-pit by Mbutu snatching at him as he trod at the edge. Always there was the bush to be penetrated; colossal trees to be avoided; riotous creepers to be dodged; and Tom was very glad when night came and Mbutu found him a hollow tree to sleep in.

On this night the parts were reversed, for while Tom fell into a sound sleep at once, Mbutu sat up, watchful and anxious. He had been disturbed by the sight of leopard scratches on the trunks of teak, and as a measure of precaution had borrowed his master's box of matches and kindled a fire--a slow process with the damp wood. But he was still more disturbed by the scarcity of food. He had noticed during their last hour's walk the almost complete absence of the edible plants on which they had fed hitherto, and he feared that they might have reached one of those regions of the forest where food, except wild animals to be hunted, is unprocurable. Before he at last closed his eyes he tore a strip off the burnous girt about his loins, and contrived to make with it a running noose, which he hung a foot or two above the ground upon a spray of thorn. This was a simple snare into which he hoped that a coney or some other small animal might run its neck before morning. But when the dawn broke, the noose was still hanging empty, and Mbutu, after a scrutiny of the bush, announced that his master would have to dispense with breakfast. Tom took the news lightly, in order not to discourage his companion.

"Cheer up!" he said. "It won't be the first time I've been for a tramp before breakfast. There's plenty of dew, I see, so that we can have a drink, and perhaps by the time we're sharp-set we shall be in the land of plenty."

So they started cheerfully enough, making still towards the south-west. But Tom's confidence proved to be not justified. The character of the vegetation had somewhat changed. It grew as thick as ever, but while many of the plants bore attractive-looking berries, Mbutu informed his master that they were all poisonous. They did come upon a mass of wild bananas, but only the cultivated fruit is eatable. Even when they reached what had once been a clearing, where a grove of plantains might have been expected, they found that elephants had been running riot, and the vegetation there was trampled into a pulp. Once Mbutu uttered a cry of joy on catching sight of a small arum bush; he sprang forward, dug up the roots with his knife, slit them into slices, and roasted them over a fire. That was all the food they obtained that day. It had been very hot, the air had seemed almost solid, and the foetid exhalations from the soft places they had passed made Tom feel sick and disconsolate.

When they stopped for the night, Mbutu again lit a watch-fire, and set his noose. In the morning he was wakened by a faint cry, and, springing up, he saw that a coney had been caught in the snare, and had at that moment been pounced on by a wild cat. He was too hungry to allow himself to be forestalled. He picked up his knife and made for the cat, which turned its head without relaxing its hold, and showed its teeth as though inclined to fight. But when Mbutu was almost upon it, with an angry snarl it loosed its prey and sprang up into a tree. The coney was already dead, its neck broken by the cat's fierce onslaught. Mbutu had the animal half-skinned when his master awoke.

"What are you about?" cried Tom, horrified at seeing Mbutu lifting a piece of raw flesh to his mouth.

"Hungry, sah; coney berrah good."

"But you can't eat it raw, surely! Ugh! you'll make me sick."

Mbutu put down the morsel with a look in which mingled emotions were expressed.

"Make fire in two ticks," he said resignedly, a phrase he had heard Tom use; and in a short time he was toasting some steaks at the fire, while his master searched for fruit. He found a few berries, and both he and Mbutu ate their meal ravenously, feeling still hungry when they had finished.

The fourth day of their forest march was but a repetition of the third. They found almost nothing eatable, and even good water was scarcer than on the previous day. At one point a huge puff-adder lay coiled in their path, and Mbutu wished to kill it, assuring his master that the reptile was too sluggish to defend itself. But Tom shuddered, and bade him come away. Later in the day Mbutu suddenly flung his knife at a tawny creature with black spots and a long, striped, bushy tail--a genet cat, as Tom afterwards discovered,--but the weapon missed by barely an inch. That was the last chance they had that day of securing animal

food, and they had to content themselves with a few dry and unpalatable, though perfectly wholesome, roots, which Mbutu grubbed up, and the leaves of herbs growing low.

Both the travellers had spoken jestingly of their hunger, for each was unwilling to depress the other; but it was a hollow pretence. Both, but Tom more especially, were already feeling the weakening effects of privation.

Before they settled for the night, Tom thought it well to speak plainly to Mbutu. His own uneasiness was deepened by his feeling of responsibility for the boy.

"Mbutu," he said gravely, "if we do not find food to-morrow we shall begin to starve. I don't know what starvation means; it is too horrible, almost, to think of. Yet we must face the possibility. Now, I brought you into this, and it isn't fair that you should come to harm on my account. If we find no food to-morrow, I think you had better go on without me. You can make your way more easily than I, and if you come to a village and get food you can bring me some; if not, go on; it is better for one to starve than two."

"No! no! no!" said Mbutu vehemently; "sah fader and mudder. Food come by and by; no die dis time."

But the poor boy, when his master had fallen asleep, looked anxiously at his pinched face. The cheeks were thinned and drawn, there were dark sunken patches below the eyes, and his tall frame seemed even taller and thinner. Ever since the young Englishman had saved him from De Castro's whip, Mbutu had cherished a sentiment of absolute devotion for him, only intensified by the hazards of their later adventures. He would have laid down his life for him, and indeed, though Tom had not noticed it, the boy had already stinted himself even of the little food he had obtained. "My master is much bigger than I," was his half-formed thought, "and needs more to keep his strength up."

The morning of their fifth day in the forest broke dull and depressing. Huge blankets of mist clothed tree and shrub, and a light breeze set up strange cross currents which rolled great white billows one against another, swirling and eddying, twisting and twining like animate things. Tom shivered as he awoke; the violent changes of temperature had made him somewhat feverish, and his sunken eyes, unnaturally bright, seemed for a moment to gaze out vacantly upon the encircling walls of misty green. His limbs ached, and he got up stiffly. Mbutu was not in sight, but returned presently, bringing with him some cassava tubers and arum roots which he cooked for his master's breakfast. Tom found it difficult to eat them. He smiled a weary smile.

"We shall have to tighten our belts to-day, Mbutu," he said. "Did you ever hear of that? Twist your burnous more tightly round your loins and you won't feel the pain so much. And we must be careful of our matches, too. The box is

half-empty and we can't get any more."

"Make fire with wood, sah," said Mbutu.

"But wouldn't that be difficult with the damp stuff around us? We must keep up our courage and get on. We can't tell the way till the sun is up, and indeed I'm afraid we shall never see the sun in this thick forest."

"Me climb tree, sah; see sun den."

Mbutu began to clamber up into the foliage, and springing dexterously from branch to branch ascended to the top, where, a hundred and fifty feet from the ground, above the rolling banks of mist, he caught sight of the red sun rising above the limitless expanse of waving green. Descending rapidly, he told his master he was now sure of the direction in which they should go, and before seven o'clock they had begun again their painful march.

Tom had to stop frequently to rest. The gnawing pains of hunger told more seriously upon him than upon the Muhima, for his life for the past three weeks had been more than hard, making unaccustomed demands upon his strength. He still felt the effects of his wound. They found a few berries and edible roots, and if such supplies, meagre as they were, continued, Tom hoped to stave off actual starvation.

"Surely we shall come to a native village by and by," he said hopefully. "Even the pigmies might take pity on starving men."

But Mbutu shook his head; he had no faith in the compassion or generosity of pigmies; he knew of them only as dangerous foes. In the afternoon they reached a spot where the ground began to slope downwards, and the vegetation appeared still thicker and more entangled.

"Coming to ribber, sah," said Mbutu eagerly. "Perhaps huts; perhaps catch fish."

Fifteen minutes later, in truth, they came suddenly to the brink of a river, through a hedge of creeping-plants covering every inch of ground from the water's edge to the green-black forest behind. The current was fairly strong, and the water was tea-coloured, suggesting iron in solution, swirling with dingy froth around a few boulders that stood out above the surface here and there. Mbutu, scanning the opposite bank, uttered a cry of joy. The stream was some fifty yards wide, and on the other side there was a narrow rift in the vegetation, so narrow indeed that Tom did not discern it until it was pointed out to him.

"Path, sah!" said Mbutu. "'Spect huts ober dar. Huts, food. Plenty food, oh yes!"

They sat down for a few moments to rest on a rock at the edge of the stream, gazing in silence at the gurgling water. Suddenly Mbutu twitched his master's sleeve and pointed to the farther bank. Just emerging from the leafy hedge, through the narrow opening, was a diminutive and graceful little woman,

copper-coloured, with raven-black hair, a broad round face, and full lustrous eyes. Three iron rings were coiled spiral-shaped about her neck. She was crooning happily to a tiny brown child toddling by her side, and on her head a small pitcher was cleverly balanced. She came down to the water's edge and stooped to fill her pitcher, still chanting softly a quaint song that Tom thought wonderfully pretty. Her boy leant over the water in comical mimicry of his mother.

"Bambute woman, sah," whispered Mbutu.

Low as the words were uttered, the channel between the high banks acted as a sound-board, and the sharp ears of the little woman heard them. She looked up, gave a startled cry, and stepped back. At the same instant the tiny fellow, alarmed by his mother's cry, lost his balance and toppled over into the water. The stream there was deep, flowing in strong and steady current. For one brief moment the mother seemed dazed, and Tom looked at the little brown bundle floating down stream as at some picture, not an actual thing at all. Then the woman screamed, dropped her pitcher, and forced her way along the bank, wringing her hands and moaning pitifully as she saw the stream bearing her little son away.

"She can't swim!" cried Tom, realizing the situation.

He sprang up, leapt on to the first boulder, then to the second two yards from it to the left, and took a header into deep water. Excitement lent him strength; he forgot where he was, forgot all his late sufferings, forgot the danger of chill and crocodiles; all that he saw was the drowning child, all that he thought of was his duty to save it. He struck out energetically, the current assisting him. As yet the stream had borne the child along upon its surface, but just as Tom arrived within a dozen yards of him he sank, and the mother's heart-broken cry echoed from the forest. Tom quickened his stroke, and, gathering his breath, dived just beyond the spot where he had last seen the brown body. It was difficult to make out anything in the tan-coloured water, but he fancied he saw the little black head, threw out his right hand, caught a foot, and in a few seconds was safe at the surface again, the boy in his grasp.

By this time Mbutu had reached his master's side. He relieved him of the burden, and together they swam to the shore, where Tom turned the pigmy urchin on his face and slapped his back and worked his arms about till the little fellow recovered his breath. A lusty cry soon proclaimed that there was vigorous life in the tiny body. Then they carried him with some difficulty along the steep bank to the path by which he had come from the forest. They caught sight of his mother darting like a timid gazelle among the trees. Mbutu at Tom's command called to her to come and fetch her pickin, using all the dialects he knew; she stopped and faced the strangers again, but evidently understood nothing of what the Muhima said, and was too much scared to approach them. In spite of his exhaustion, Tom could not help smiling at the woman's fears.

"Put the little beggar down," he said, "and see him run."

"Want food, sah," expostulated Mbutu; "woman gib food."

"But she wants her baby first; perhaps she thinks we are cannibals, and mean to make a meal of both of them."

Mbutu shrugged, and set the boy, now fully recovered and crying lustily, upon his feet. Instantly he scampered off with wild delight to his mother. She snatched him up, smothered him with kisses, then threw him over her back and ran fleetly into the forest. In vain Mbutu called to her to bring food, shouting that the big white man would give his buttons, his coat, anything, for a chicken and some plantains. His voice only made her run the faster, and soon a turn in the narrow path concealed her altogether from view.

"We'd better go along the path after her," said Tom. "There must be a pigmy village somewhere near, and they're surely human enough to give us food."

Mbutu shook his head.

"Bambute much bad people," he said. "See white man; no fink; shoot one, two, three; sah dead."

"But we saved the youngster."

"Bambute no stop fink. Woman say big sah, berrah big; Bambute no wait; all come in one big hurry, shoot sah. Better go away too quick."

"Well, you ought to know them better than I." (He suddenly, in one of those odd flashes of memory that come at the most unlikely moments, remembered Mr. Barkworth's positive statement: "There's no gratitude in these natives!") "Let us go, then; lead the way."

They scrambled along the bank, stumbling over rocks and projecting thorn-sprays, Mbutu urging his master to hurry, lest the whole pigmy village should come hot-foot at their heels. It seemed strange to Tom that the little people should feel animosity against inoffensive travellers who had actually done them a service, but he relied upon his boy, in whom he had seen no signs of cowardice. The fact was that Mbutu had never before actually come into contact with the pigmies, and knew them only by hearsay. He had a child's dread of the unknown, and the stories he had heard prompted him to keep as far as possible out of harm's way.

Tom's exertions, acting on his enfeebled frame, had worn him out, and but for Mbutu's entreaties he would have refused to budge. His clothes were drying in the sunlight, but he was chilled to the bone, and terribly hungry. Mbutu insisted that they ought to hide their trail by wading in the stream where it was shallow enough, and thus, alternately on land and in water, they covered rather more than three miles. Then Tom declared that he could go no farther, and sat down upon a dry rock to rest, while Mbutu scrambled up the bank and into the forest in search of food. He brought back a handful of papaws and amoma fruits.

"Why, this is quite luxurious!" said Tom, delighted at getting a change from

the disagreeable roots on which he had subsisted for the past few days.

"Sah wait bit," said Mbutu with a knowing smile. He waded out to a large rock in mid-stream, threw himself flat upon it, and peered over into the water. A few moments passed; then Tom saw the boy's knife flash as he plunged his arm into the water. He drew it up, and there was a fine fish, somewhat resembling a trout, gleaming on the point. He looked round triumphantly at Tom; then bent once more over the water, and soon speared another fish in the same way. When he had caught four he returned to the bank, and asked his master for the box of matches.

"Why, they're soaked; absolutely useless, Mbutu. You'll have to make fire some other way."

Mbutu at once cut a small block of hard wood from a tree, and scooped out a little hollow in it. Then he found a thin straight switch, and sharpened it at one end. He inserted this in the hollow of the block, and began to twirl it round rapidly in both hands. He was out of practice, and looked rather blue when no fire came; but, persevering, he succeeded after some minutes in kindling a spark. He then lit a fire, slit and cleaned the fish, and had the delight of offering his master some appetizing broiled fish-steaks. Not content with this, he returned to the rock, rapidly captured half a dozen more fish, and then, throwing on to the fire the leaves of plants that made a thick smoke, he attempted a rough-and-ready process of dry-curing. This done, he searched about till he found a thin and flexible tendril, on which he strung the dried fish, declaring gleefully that his master would certainly have a good breakfast next day.

There being still two hours or more of daylight left, as they judged by the position of the sun, they walked on again, feeling refreshed in body, and more cheerful in mind than they had been for a week. They still clung to the edge of the stream, and at one point narrowly escaped treading on a crocodile basking by the bank, where it was indistinguishable from a log of wood. Mbutu was only warned of the danger by a sudden startling flash of light. Jumping back, he pointed out that the glare was the reflection of the sun in the saurian's greedy eye. By and by they came to a tributary flowing into the river on the right hand. It was a fairly large stream, about thirty yards broad at the point of ingress, and as its course was from the south-east, Tom decided to turn and follow it up. While tramping below the left bank, which was high and steep, and finding the walking rather easier than it had been hitherto, the ground being rocky, they came to a deep inlet, at the bottom of which there was a cavern; half-hidden by vine-sprays trailing over the bank.

"The very place for our night's rest," said Tom.

They entered, strewed leaves and grass on the smooth dry floor, and slept soundly till daybreak. Though his limbs ached when he rose, and he was still

feverish, Tom felt better than on the previous day, and ate heartily of the broiled fish and roots which Mbutu had prepared for him. Then, leaving the cave, they walked for about half a mile, and found that the stream bent suddenly round to the left. Mbutu climbed a tree, and told his master that he could see the water for some distance, forming a loop and winding away towards the north. Arabs would certainly be ranging the country in that direction; there was nothing for it but to strike into the forest again, and pursue their journey to the south or south-west.

Tom was not reassured by the aspect of the forest. While there was less of tangled undergrowth and thorn, the trees appeared to be thicker and larger than ever. There was no sign of edible plants, but the animals were even more numerous, and the insects more multitudinous and irritating. As they crossed a babbling rivulet, apparently a tributary of the stream they had recently left, they were met by a cloud of moths reaching from the water's face to the loftiest tree-tops, and looking, as it approached, like a glittering shower of lavender-coloured snow, the particles whirling about in the slight gusts that blew along the course of the streamlet. Farther on, a dozen tree stems, thrown down during a recent storm, lay across one another at various angles, completely blocking the way, and the travellers found that the easiest mode of proceeding was to clamber up one of them that sloped at an angle of forty-five degrees, and to scramble thence on to another, and then to another sloping downwards, until they reached terra firma again. Their progress was terribly slow and arduous, and long before the mid-day heat rendered rest imperative, Tom felt thoroughly exhausted. His clothes were now a miscellany of rags, his boots mere gaps. He noticed what appeared to be ulcers breaking out upon his arms, and found that the exertion of walking and climbing made him faint, and produced a keen pain in his chest. He had had nothing to eat since the last of Mbutu's fish was consumed, and with the faintness and hunger came inevitable dejection of mind.

While he rested on a log, Mbutu went off alone to search again for food, but could find nothing but a few withered berries and some fungi, which, suspicious as they were, Tom was fain to swallow.

"We must try again," he said presently. "I am beginning to think it would have been better to follow the stream and chance the Arabs. I can't keep up much longer, Mbutu."

The Muhima was speechless, though his eyes eloquently expressed his anxiety and affection. Before they resumed their journey he cut his master another stout staff from a sapling of hard wood, the first having been lost in the stream. After struggling through the forest for about an hour, every step more painful to Tom, they came suddenly upon an unexpected scene of desolation. It was a wide clearing, on which a village of considerable dimensions had at one time stood; the blackened ground told a tale of burning and rapine. Beyond it there were whole

groves of banana-trees scorched and ruined, hundreds of palms lying prostrate, and acres of ground, once cultivated, now denuded of every vestige of life. Near a heap of ashes lay a number of charred bones, and Tom shuddered as he passed on.

Beyond this area of destruction the forest was less dense, and Mbutu by and by discovered a narrow track which he declared was the pathway of pigmies. He looked round apprehensively, fearing every moment lest swift arrows from unseen bows in the brushwood should put a sudden end to their lives. Once he exclaimed that he heard the clash of spears amid the foliage, but Tom assured him it must be simply the rustling of stiff leaves. As the evening shades were falling, the boy asserted positively that he saw little faces peering at him from the trees, and Tom, with a weary sigh, answered:

"I do not care, Mbutu. Elves or sprites or human beings, they don't concern us unless they bring us food. Perhaps the pigmies have been shadowing us all the way since we saved that boy; why should they wish to hurt us? If you see one again, call to him. Call now; perhaps there is a settlement near; we might miss many in this wild forest."

Mbutu plucked up courage to call, but the only answer was a manifold echo from the trees, the squawk of parrots, and what sounded like the barking laugh of the hyena. Tom could walk no farther; he felt that he would fain rest for ever. On this night Mbutu built up a small hut of leaves and twigs for his master, and lit a watch-fire to scare, away wild intruders. For supper they gnawed some leaves, but Tom fell into the sleep of exhaustion in the middle of his scanty meal, and Mbutu sat for hours watching him uneasily. He, too, was at last overcome by fatigue, but not until he had thoughtfully heaped enough fuel on the fire to last until dawn. Tom woke first. He rose feebly and staggered oat of the hut, his forehead hot, his hands clammy; and there, between the still burning fire and his rough shelter, was a huge bunch of plantains! He could scarcely believe his eyes. He called Mbutu, but the boy did not stir. He went to him and shook him.

"Where did you get them?" he asked. "Have you eaten some yourself?"

Mbutu sprang up and stared, not understanding what his master meant, and believing that he must be light-headed. When Tom pointed to the plantains, the boy gave a gasp and looked up in the trees and all around in amazement. Without another word both began to eat ravenously, and not till they had nearly finished the bunch did Mbutu suggest an explanation of the godsend. The spirits of his ancestors, he said, must have been watching over him, or perhaps the Great Spirit of whom he had heard the White Father speak, and who really did seem to care for the black man and white man alike, as the missionary had averred. Tom let the boy talk on. Suddenly a hare-shaped animal darted across the ground in front of them; there was a whirring sound; the animal fell, a short arrow piercing

it to the heart. Mbutu sprang up, and ran towards it; then started back, and looked about him with wide scared eyes. Nothing happened; the skilful marksman did not appear to claim his prize; the morning stillness was not broken by so much as a rustling leaf. Mbutu again moved towards the animal, treading delicately, and stopping at every second step to glance fearfully around. He seized the animal, and ran back swiftly with it.

"Bambute, sah!" he whispered, in a tone of awe. "Sah him friends. Sah sabe pickin; Bambute much glad. Oh yes! no want food no more; Bambute gib food."

Again Tom seemed to hear Mr. Barkworth's voice: "There's no gratitude in these natives! I know them." He wondered whether the fact was as Mbutu had surmised; whether the woman had brought her people to see the white man; whether they had dogged the travellers all the way, or had come upon them by accident. Mbutu was already skinning the animal, and preparing it for the fire. Never was flesh more welcome to starving men. Refreshed and strengthened, Tom rose with renewed hope to continue his march.

But next day the old dejection returned. Of the pigmies there was no sign; no heaven-sent food was placed at their feet; they trudged on and on, almost blindly, always hungry. So four days passed, days upon which Tom could never look back without a shudder of horror. Stories of prisoners starving in barred dungeons recurred to his mind; and he wondered which was worse, slowly to pine away in confinement, within bare stone walls that invited death, or to die in the midst of vigorous life, with liberty to range immense spaces. "Death is only death after all," he thought, and he remembered Gordon's words, quoted by Mr. Barkworth: "Heaven is as near the hot desert as the cool church at home". But his mind revolted against death. "I am young--young!" his heart cried. "I want to live, to do things. I am not a broken horse or a rusty engine. No, Tom Burnaby, I'll never forgive you if you chuck it all up yet." And he braced himself and plodded on.

Just after noon, on the fifth day after the pigmies' present, the travellers found that the forest was thinning somewhat; the trees were farther apart, and there was a renewal of the low bush, not so dense or so obstructive as it had been for the past few days. Presently they came to an almost open glade, and Mbutu pointed to a track crossing the direction of their march from clump to clump. It was not four hours old, he declared; the footprints were still soft and clearly marked. They were too large to have been made by pigmies. The weary travellers sat down on a heap of leaves, hastily collected, to talk the matter over, Mbutu being in favour of going in the same direction as the footprints, which must lead, sooner or later, to a village. Suddenly they heard a rapid thud-thud as of heavy footsteps on the sodden ground, accompanied by a curious clanking, suggesting to Tom the sound of a loose horseshoe on a turfy moor. As they were

wondering what it might be, a tall black figure, scantily clad, ran out of the forest on their right, labouring heavily, the sweat rolling off his face and body, his eyes protruding with eagerness and fear. Tom had just noticed that part of a chain, with a broken block of wood attached to it, hung from a gyve on the man's left ankle, and another chain from an iron circlet about his left wrist, when three Arabs and a negro came out of the wood at short intervals in hot pursuit.

Tom and Mbutu were partially concealed from the strangers by the straggling bush. Pursued and pursuers had almost crossed the wide open space, the foremost Arab but a yard behind, when the fettered negro stopped short suddenly, turned round, and with a desperate movement of his left arm struck the Arab full in the face with the dangling chain. The Arab dropped, and the hunted man turned again to flee, but the rest were almost upon him. Tom saw that, encumbered as the negro was, he must inevitably be run down in a few moments. Instinctively taking the weaker side, and forgetting his own exhaustion, he sprang up, and sprinting with all the speed of which his tired limbs were capable, he dashed after the pursuers, followed closely by Mbutu. The chase had evidently been a long one; hunters and hunted were breathless, and trod heavily. In the excitement of the moment Tom dashed along at a speed of which a minute earlier he would have thought himself utterly incapable; and he soon saw that he was gaining rapidly on the Arabs. They had muskets, which he inferred they had already fired, and had had no time to reload. He had his staff, and Mbutu clutched his knife.

The foremost of the two remaining Arabs and the negro were closing on the fugitive when Tom overtook the second Arab. He, hearing the thud of rapid footsteps immediately behind, checked his pace, and gave a startled glance backwards. Instantly Tom's fist was flung out, and the Arab, receiving the full force of the blow between the eyes, spun round, and rolled over and over. Mbutu, as he shot by, snatched at his falling musket, and making upon the pursuing negro, thrust it between his legs, so that he was tripped up and fell heavily. He clutched at Mbutu to save himself, and both reached the ground together. There was a short, sharp struggle; Mbutu wriggled out of the big man's grip, and drove his knife through his heart.

Meanwhile the fugitive, taking advantage of this miraculous succour, had stopped running, and was now engaging the only remaining Arab in a singular duel. He was swinging the chain upon his wrist like a flail, the Arab using the musket in his left hand to parry its clanking strokes. It was an unequal contest. The negro's force was spent; the chain was no match for weapons firmly held. The Arab was just about to rush in with his knife under the negro's guard when he was struck smartly behind the knee with Tom's thick staff, and as he half fell his panting opponent brought the chain down with one tremendous sweep and stretched him senseless.

The rescued negro flung himself face downwards on the ground, gasping, almost sobbing, with relief. Tom looked round for the Arab whom he had first struck down, and caught sight of him speeding back into the forest. The big negro was dead; one of the prostrate Arabs was stirring, the other still lay unconscious.

Tom sat down to rest, propping his head on his arms, and panting from his exertions. Mbutu stood anxiously scanning the fugitive, who by and by turned over, and looked at his rescuers with eyes that plainly told how puzzled he was at the mystery of their intervention. He was a fine-looking man, with strong muscular frame, and a face of great intelligence and some refinement of feature. About his close woolly hair he wore two thin fillets, and a dozen necklaces of string encircled his neck, a number of small wooden charms dangling from them; from a longer string a cube of wood hung upon his breast. Mbutu, after gazing at him in silence for a moment or two, suddenly addressed to him a few words in a Bantu dialect. The man started, fixed his eyes in keen scrutiny on the boy's face, and then answered him in the same language. A rapid dialogue ensued, and Mbutu, turning eagerly to his master, exclaimed:

"Him Muhima, sah; Muhima like Mbutu; him chief, name Barega. Say sah him fader and mudder; him gib sah hut, and food--eberyfing belong him."

Tom smiled wearily. His recent exertions had, he felt, precipitated the inevitable collapse. He was approaching the last stage of exhaustion.

"I'm glad, Mbutu," he said. "But had we not better be going? These Arabs may belong to a party, and we shall almost certainly be pursued and outnumbered. I can hardly walk, but the chief's village may not be far. Can he take us there?"

Mbutu again spoke with his compatriot.

"Yes, sah," he said at length. "Village five marches ober dar. Say must go all too quick."

"Five marches! I can never do it."

"Try, sah, try; must do it," cried the boy imploringly himself trembling with pain and fatigue.

"One more try, then. Can we first knock off the man's chains?"

The negro, himself exerting tremendous power with fingers and wrist, managed, with Mbutu's assistance, to break off both chains, leaving simply the circles of iron about his wrist and ankle. The three then prepared to start; but as they turned Tom felt a touch of compunction for the two Arabs prostrate on the ground, but still alive.

"I don't like leaving them to perish. What can we do for them?"

"Nuffin, nuffin, sah," cried Mbutu. "All too bad lot. Chief kill."

"No, I can't allow it," said Tom sternly. "Go to the dead negro, and tear a strip off his loin-cloth. If you peg it to a tree it is bound to attract the attention of their companion when he returns with help."

Mbutu having, with rather an ill grace, done his master's bidding, the Bahima chief led the way into the forest towards the south-west, Tom and the boy, each with a musket in his right hand, following him painfully. They never knew that, just as they disappeared among the trees, half a dozen little naked figures sprang silently out of the wood on the other side. They darted to the fallen Arabs, pierced them through and through with their spears, and then, despoiling them of their clothing, vanished again into the forest as noiselessly as they had come.

CHAPTER XI

The Valley of the Shadow

Barega Tells His Story--Malaria--The Major Writes Home--The End of a Long Vigil--Mabruki: Medicine-man--A Moving Dialogue--On The Brink

Ignorant of how the pigmies had rounded off their work, the travellers accompanied the Bahima chief along the narrow path into the forest. At first he went too fast for them, until Mbutu explained that they had been wandering for twelve days through the forest, and were on the verge of starvation. He told also how his master, like the chief himself, had been a prisoner among Arabs, and had escaped when barely recovered from a terrible wound inflicted on him during a great single-handed fight with the Arab chief. Mbutu did not fail to impress his compatriot with the rank and prowess of the Englishman. As for his present worn and enfeebled condition, that was obvious to the most casual glance. On hearing all this the rescued Muhima expressed his sympathy with a grace and courtesy that seemed to Tom wonderfully well bred, and further acquaintance with the people confirmed his belief, first formed from his knowledge of Mbutu, that Central Africa contains some of Nature's gentlemen.

As they went on their way, Tom asked the chief through Mbutu to tell his own story. He was nothing loth, and at once began a narrative which beguiled more than an hour of weary walking. It was often interrupted by questions from Mbutu, who, as he translated, mingled comments and explanatory remarks with the chief's own statements. Stripped of these annotations, and rendered into straightforward English, it ran somewhat as follows:--

"You ask me for my story? Know then, O white man, that I am Barega,

a chief among chiefs, owning no man lord. Not of a handful of men and a few hundred cattle am I chief; no, I am Barega; many chiefs own my sway; my rule extends over ten times thirty Bahima, great hunters all of them, and multitudes of Bairo like the stars of heaven. No menial delvers of the soil are we Bahima; no, we tend countless herds of cattle and goats, whose flesh we eat and milk we drink. And I--I am Barega, a mighty chief. The Bugandanwe is mine--the king-drum handed down from my father's fathers through a hundred years, whose sound strikes terror into the souls of our enemies, and even disquiets Magaso himself, the devil that haunts our groves and feasts on our bananas. Bananas!--I eat them not; my meat is the flesh of oxen, sheep, and goats; but the Bairo eat them, the Bairo our servants, whose blood is not our blood, nor their ways our ways.

"Know this, O white man, son of the Great King, for thou didst find me a prisoner, and 'tis not well that thou shouldst think me one of the common people, born of slaves. No, I am a mighty chief. Four years have I ruled my tribe, and there are none like them in all the earth for strength or wealth, for skill in hunting or prowess in war. My father had many sons, but out of them all he chose me to rule after him. True, I have an elder brother, Murasi is his name; and a younger brother, Mwonga; but Murasi is a reed, a straw blown hither and thither by the breath of Mabruki, my medicine-man, who quaffs lakes of museru and then weeps rivers of tears. As for Mwonga, he is but a boy, and him I keep as my chief mutuma, head of the fifty boys who guard my dwelling and fulfil my behest, and whom I train in arms and all manly doing. Murasi I did not slay; no, nor does he languish in the prison where he lies; he is fed with good food and wine. The white man wonders? True, other chiefs would have slain him, but I am merciful, I do but keep him in prison. Were Murasi free, he would plot against me, work mischief among my people, try to rob me of my hut and place. He must not be free; it is I, Barega, that say it.

"I was a prisoner with the Arabs--cats, jackals, beasts unfit to herd with the Bahima's dogs! I hide my face; it shames me to have been their captive. And yet it was no shame; if any man cries shame, I say he lies. I was far from my village, hunting great elephants. Twenty of my best spearmen were with me, tall men and big of heart. We were far in the forest towards the setting sun, and one day we saw, in a glade beyond us, a herd of elephants with tusks longer than a man and whiter than milk. My men stretched their net and dug a pit, the skewers cunningly planted at the bottom, so that they might drive the animals therein and take them thus. But that, forsooth, is poor sport for a hunter like Barega. 'No, let us take them with our spears,' I said, 'and have true tales of a mighty killing to tell about our fires of winter nights.' Know, O white man, that we Bahima tell truth and no lies. So then did we stalk those noble animals, but they lifted up their trunks and smelt us, and straightway uttered a great voice and fled. But we are fleet of foot;

no pot-bellied sluggards are we, like the Ankole; no, we are slim, and straight, and lithe of limb as thou seest; we are thy cousins, O white man! Swiftly then did we pursue the elephants; leopards could not have gone more silently. They forgot us, and stayed to rest and pluck the tender leaves at the ends of the branches. Not a word, not a cry. I was in front of my men; the chief must ever show the way. I marked the prince and lord of the elephants and said: 'He is mine; let no man touch him.' I poised my spear; I flung it with aim swift and sure; it smote behind the ear; the beast fell. Ere he could rise, another spear, and another, from this same right hand pierced him, and in a little he died.

"Two other elephants had fallen to the spears of my men, the rest had fled. Then did we make a camp, and sat us down to rest by our spoils. The sun went down, and as we sang our hunting-song around our fire, behold! there came out of the forest, silently, like the servaline, a band of Arabs. Around us they made a ring, and with their loud fire-sticks they slew ten of my people. I sprang to my feet; not mine to flee; no, I hurled at them my last spear, and then a blazing brand snatched from the fire. See, there is the scar on my hand to-day--the mark of the fire. But they were more than we; they threw themselves upon me, and put their cursed ropes upon my hands and feet. Then they carried me and my ten men to a fortress many marches in the forest, and loaded me with the chains of slaves. Many days was I thus fettered; then, at the rising of the sun they came to me and said: 'Dog!'--woe is me, that I, Barega, was called a dog!--'take us to your village.' 'Pig!' I cried, 'I would rather die!' Then did they beat me with their whips till, in my pain, I called on Muhanga, the Mighty Spirit that upholds the sky and rules the thunder and rain, to slay me. Yet I bethought myself: 'They will not all come to my village till they have spied it out.' I know their ways. 'I will deceive them; I will lead them into the forest, and then Muhanga will send a storm, and I shall escape.' And then a band of them loosed me, and fettered me with other chains, and made me walk with them, my hands bound together, my two feet linked to a block of wood between them, so that I hobbled slowly and with pain.

"Then came we into the forest, by winding tracks that I knew well. Nine nights ago the sky opened, Muhanga threw his flaming spears and poured out his floods. The Arabs cursed Muhanga; I praised him in my heart. They crouched in hollow trees and in big bushes to escape the storm. 'Let the dog wash,' they said of me. But in the black darkness, when the thunder roared, I wrenched my hands apart till a link snapped, and then with my free hand tore at my ankle-chains until I had wrested one of them from the block. I could not cast off my fetters altogether; the storm began to abate, and I dared not stay. I ran and ran hard through the night, and for days and nights after, away, away, far from the tracks I knew. Woe is me! An evil spirit must have led mine enemy! To-day, when the sun rose, I saw them close upon me, but only four of them; the others, I

make no doubt, were searching for me otherwhere in the forest. I ran from them, but the clank of my chains called them after me, and when I was nigh to falling, thou camest out of the forest, O white man, and smotest them even as Muhanga smiteth in his wrath, and didst save me, and I hold thee in my heart for ever. But they are many and will now pursue us; they will come with their whole band, and with their fire-sticks will seek us out, to kill me and all my people. Therefore let us make what haste we can, and in my village the white man shall live in peace; he shall see my wives and warriors and all my gathered store; he shall eat my best cattle and drink my newest milk and strongest wine till his cheeks are round and his muscles firm again. I, Barega, have said it."

Such was Barega's story. Tom had listened with an interest that for a time made him forget his feeling of intense weakness. He walked along as well as he could, stooping occasionally to avoid creepers, using his musket now as a staff, now as a means of fending off obstructions. But he felt that collapse ere long was inevitable, and all that he could hope for was that he might retain sufficient strength to reach the Bahima village before he broke down.

The collapse came on the second evening after their adventure with the Arabs. They had fed mainly on roots, and drunk from the rills they met at intervals along the track. Barega's woodcraft served them well when even Mbutu's was at fault, but all three were racked with the gnawing pains of hunger. Sores had broken out in several parts of Tom's body; his head was never free from pain; and on the evening of the second day, just as they stopped to find a camping-place for the night, he tottered, and would have fallen but for the ready support of Mbutu's arm.

"It's no good, Mbutu," he said, with an attempt to smile; "I'm done up. I can't hold out any longer."

"Soon get well, sah," said Mbutu, helping him tenderly to recline with his back against a tree. But the boy was in reality stricken with terror lest his master should die. He had recognized the dreaded signs of malaria, and there, in the midst of the forest, with no medicines at hand and no nourishing food, he feared that there would be but one end, and that speedily. Tom fell into a heavy sleep almost as soon as he lay down, and Mbutu held an anxious consultation with the chief. What could be done? They could carry the invalid between them, but progress would be slow, and he needed immediate attention, and above all, something to protect him from insects during the day. They were still at least three days' march from the village. Mbutu was almost in despair, when the chief made a suggestion. Let them build a grass hut, he said, at a reasonably safe distance from the track, and let Mbutu watch his master there while he himself hurried on alone to his village. They were not far from the edge of the forest, which was already becoming thinner. He would start at once for help, and could cover the distance to the village

at a run in a night and a day.

The plan seemed feasible, and indeed the only possible one under the circumstances. To force a way for a quarter of a mile from the track, clear a space, and build a grass hut upon it was the work of rather more than two hours. When it was done, the two Bahima gently carried Tom to the resting-place and laid him down on a comfortable couch of leaves, and then the chief, tightening his strip of bark cloth around his loins, started, promising to travel, without resting, through the night, and to use his utmost speed.

Mbutu, left alone with the invalid, spent the last half-hour of daylight in collecting a small quantity of ripe berries, and then sat down to watch. He dared not light a fire in case the Arabs happened to be near enough to see or smell the smoke. It was no small testimony to Mbutu's devotion that he was so willing, for all his dread of goblins, to remain with his master, unable now to talk the boy's fears away or to defend him against danger.

As Mbutu sat, touching his master's hand and brow occasionally, and trembling as he felt how hot they were, he suddenly remembered that he had seen him put a packet of the quinine given him by the missionary into his vest pocket. He wondered whether it was still there. The Arabs were not likely to have taken it; he only feared lest, with the wettings it had suffered, the drug should have lost its virtue.

Gently lifting the burnous which he had thrown over his master, and feeling in his clothes, he was overjoyed to find in the pocket where he had seen it put a small paper packet, showing only too plain signs of the soakings it had gone through. He opened it, the paper dropping to pieces under his touch. There was a little something there, not a powder any longer, but a paste. Was there the least remnant of virtue in it? There could be no harm in trying a dose, and Mbutu carefully and tenderly put a small quantity of the paste between Tom's parted lips. Twice again during the night he repeated the dose, anxiously feeling the invalid's brow each time, as though hoping for an instant result. Not for a moment did he close his eyes, but when he felt drowsiness stealing upon him he rose and walked to and fro before the hut, murmuring the half-forgotten words of some fetish spell he had learnt when a child. But he had little faith in fetish now. If only the white medicine-man were there! He had unbounded confidence in Dr. Corney O'Brien.

Dr. Corney O'Brien was, alas! more than a thousand miles away, sitting in the smoking-room of the Mombasa club, waiting with some impatience for Major Burnaby to finish the letter he was writing at the table. It was a letter home, to Mr. Barkworth, and the doctor knew why his friend's face wore such a look of concern as his pen scratched over the paper.

... "I thought," he wrote, "that I knew my nephew pretty well, but I know only now--alas! too late, I fear--what grit there was in him. We old stagers are too much inclined, perhaps, to pooh-pooh the enthusiasms of our juniors. The boy was built for a soldier and nothing else, and I blame myself now for not moving heaven and earth to get him into the service. When I saw him come into camp that evening, I own I was at first desperately annoyed with you for allowing him to follow us up; although I could not help admitting it was an uncommonly plucky thing of the youngster to undertake such an enterprise through a strange and savage country. He showed both courage and resource in the adventure with that rascally Portuguese; but what I feel most proud of is the grit with which he stuck to his task when every step must have been agony. But for him the expedition might easily have come to grief. The enemy's plan was as good as any I ever met with; if it had come off it would have been touch and go with us. You may be quite sure that in my report home I have taken care to represent in its true light the service he did us. Nothing has yet been heard of him. I've offered the most tempting rewards. He either died of his wound, or is a prisoner with the Arabs. In the latter case the strange thing is that no attempt has been made to get a ransom for him. Perhaps the Portuguese is in some way concerned; if so, then God help him! I have asked Father Chevasse to do what he can--the missionaries have as good a chance to get news of him as anyone,--and be sure that I will let you know if anything turns up. I am entitled to come home on furlough, but I've arranged to stay out here a month or two longer. It was very pleasant to get your cable of congratulation, and to hear of all the nice things said of me at home; but you'll believe me when I say that I'd give it all up and drop out of sight gladly, if by so doing I could get a glimpse of Tom."

For three terrible nights and days Mbutu kept faithful watch over his sick master in the forest. It seemed an age to the poor boy. Tom was unconscious almost all the time, his eyes burning bright, his cheeks flushed, his lips ever and anon muttering and babbling of things incomprehensible to Mbutu. The Muhima hardly dared to leave him for a moment, and when he did leave him, wore himself out in scouring the forest within a short radius in search of food. He ventured on the second day to light a fire, over which, in a bowl he carved out of hard Wood, he tried to brew a decoction from some leaves and berries, for he found it impossible to get his master to take such solid roots as those on which he barely sustained himself. The quinine was soon exhausted. Fortunately there was plenty of good water, and at short intervals he poured a small quantity between Tom's parched lips. He hoped that the pigmies would again provide food, but there was never a sign of the little people. As hour after hour dragged slowly by, the boy fretted,

feeling his helplessness, in an agony of grief for his master, and beside himself with despair when, after brief intervals of semi-consciousness, Tom relapsed into delirium, tossing and moaning on his couch of leaves.

At sundown on the third day after the chief's departure Mbutu was walking restlessly up and down the track, peering into the tunnel of foliage. The night before, he had been scared by the cries of animals in his near neighbourhood, and his nerves were in a state of tremor. He had kept a large watch-fire burning beside his master's hut, for he felt now that, even if it did attract the Arabs, it was no worse to be slain by them than by wild beasts. More than once during this third day he had put his ear to the ground, hoping to hear the tramp of feet from the direction in which Barega had gone. Now he walked farther along the path, thinking that, if the chief had reached his village, as he had promised, in a night and a day, surely there had been time for him to return. He lay down again and pressed his ear to the beaten path. The air was still, not a leaf rustled; the sounds of day had ceased, and the nightly hum and murmur had not yet begun. What was that? Faintly, like the sound of ripples on a stream, rather a movement than a sound, something touched his ear. He got up and ran still farther along the track, then flung himself down again. He could hear nothing but the throbbing of his heart. He held his breath; yes, the sound was growing, growing; it was the sound of running feet. Was it of animals or men? It was too regular, too heavy, to be the pad of animals; it was coming nearer! He almost screamed in his excitement. Thud! thud! thud! nearer and nearer--not one sound now, but many sounds conjoined. Yes, his doubts were gone; it was a force of men, running steadily towards him. He got up, and stood, his lips parted, his eyes astare, his body bent forward in the direction of the sound, every nerve tingling, every sinew tense. Minute after minute passed; he stood alone in vaulted darkness. Now the sound was audible through the air: the steady thud of runners, broken in upon at moments by the faint far jingle of metal. Hark! there was the hum of voices, like the sound of water stirred by gusts of wind. Louder and louder it came; Mbutu's sharp ears were strained towards it. It rose and swelled; he recognized it; it was a marching-song he had not heard for years! His heart gave a great leap for joy; beyond a doubt these were Barega's men approaching; his agony was over. Hardly knowing whether to run back to his master or to run forward to meet his fellow-countrymen, he stood irresolute, his breath coming and going in quick pants. He tried to join in the song, but his throat was parched, and his voice broke in a soundless sob. He waited, waited; there was commotion in the forest; crickets and cicadas had raised their notes, as though to drown the unaccustomed sounds. He heard the crackle of snapped twigs and the rustle of parted leaves; then, a deeper blackness in the black, a form appeared, and another, and another.

"Wekaine kenaina? Can you see me?"

The words, shrilled from Mbutu's lips, brought the runners to a dead stop. There was silence for a brief moment.

"Mesitoka! I cannot!" came the answer. "Who are you?"

"Ema Mbutu, muzungu katikiro! I am Mbutu, the white man's katikiro!"

Then ensued a scene that must have provoked from the sylvan deities a kindly sympathetic smile. The foremost of the line of strangers advanced and greeted Mbutu, who was almost beside himself with excitement and relief. He wasted no time in words; he was all eagerness to lead the negroes to his master. Running in advance, then doubling back like a dog, he led the tall Muhima along the track. It was Barega's katikiro, and with him were thirty spearmen. In single file they followed Mbutu, turned aside towards the clearing, and were soon collected in a group around the blazing watch-fire--thirty tall straight warriors, the pick of Barega's body-guard, breathing hard, but ready at a word to run again. The katikiro informed Mbutu that their departure had been delayed by exciting events in their village. They had come with all speed, and behind them was another band bringing goats and flour and cooking-utensils to provide food for the sick man. A brief rest, and he was ready to start on the return journey, and he proposed to travel through the night, so that the muzungu at his first removal should not have to endure the day's heat. The spearmen, squatting in a circle about the fire, showed their native politeness by obeying the katikiro's command to talk in subdued tones.

After an hour's rest, four of the Bahima gently lifted Tom into a litter they had brought with them, and the order of march was formed. The line was led by the mugurusi, the chief's provider of firewood, who was followed by fourteen of the spearmen; then came the katikiro at the head of Tom's litter, borne by four, Mbutu walking behind; and the rear was brought up by the remaining eleven. They marched with long regular swing, and before they had gone far the omutezi wahanga, or harpist, who strode along immediately in front of the katikiro, struck up the marching-song:

"Yakuba emundu ngagayala
Mukamawange Katabuzi eikyasenga
Amaso zamynka mwenywera omwenge".

Bravely he fights; no foeman doth he dread;
Never by craven chief will I be led;
Let me drink and drink till mine eyes be red.

Three hours' march brought them to the camp, where they were boisterously

greeted by an equal band gathered about a huge fire. A large iron pot was placed in the midst of the fire, and in it the flesh of a goat was simmering in stew, thickened with plantain flour. When the new-comers had eaten their fill, a guard was set, the katikiro himself undertaking to share with Mbutu the duty of watching his master.

At dawn they resumed the march, the katikiro deciding to finish the journey by easy stages, resting for three hours at least in the hottest part of the day. The route lay through country that was thickly wooded, but not such dense forest as the wayworn travellers had just traversed. Every care was taken to protect Tom from the sun's rays and the assaults of insects, an awning being cleverly arranged about his litter, with air-holes defended from insects by a fine network of goats'-hair. The sick man was fed at intervals with diluted marwa, and with soup whenever the procession stopped.

On the way, especially when they encamped for the night, the katikiro, a man of exceedingly pleasant countenance and genial manner, talked a good deal to Mbutu, asking innumerable questions, and showing the most lively interest in the story of the ambush. In return he gave the boy, to whom he appeared to have taken a strong fancy, some very interesting information about affairs in his village. He half apologized, indeed, for the non-appearance of his chief with the rescue-party. It was due to most important events. When week after week passed by, and the chief had not returned from his great elephant-hunt, Mabruki, the medicine-man, declared after consulting his fetishes that Barega was dead. Who was to be his successor? Mabruki had at first sounded some of the more important men as to their willingness to accept himself; but finding that there was a strong feeling against anyone not of the chief's blood, he had nominated Barega's elder brother, the weak and vicious Murasi, who, drunk or sober, was completely under his thumb. Murasi, accordingly, became chief, and Mabruki appointed himself kasegara, or steward of the household. The katikiro himself, an easy-going man, ready, like the Vicar of Bray, to serve anyone so long as he retained his own office, had given his adhesion to the new chief, and remained katikiro.

These arrangements had hardly been made when Barega suddenly reappeared. The majority of the Bahima were unfeignedly glad to see their chief again; he had a kingly presence, they knew his prowess as warrior and hunter, and loved him as a fair-dealing ruler in peace. A small minority of the Bahima, however, with a considerable number of their Bairo dependents, had hoped great things of Murasi's accession, and were disposed to stick to their new chief. But the medicine-man saw that his game was up; he lost no time in obsequiously making his peace with Barega, and was the loudest in upbraiding Murasi when he whimpered at his fall from power. But though Mabruki was outwardly the loyalest subject of his chief, he was deeply chagrined at the failure of his bid for greatness,

and inwardly resolved to seize the first opportunity, fair or foul, of reinstating the elderly drunkard and getting rid of Barega.

This news gave some concern to Mbutu. With internal dissension in the village he was not sure that his master's life would be safe. But when he imparted his fears to the katikiro, that burly and cheerful soul laughed them away, assuring him that the chief's party, already numerically the stronger, would grow still larger as time went on.

On the fourth afternoon after leaving the forest, the katikiro informed Mbutu that they were approaching the village. The ground began to rise gently, and was less thickly covered with scrub. By and by a large banana-plantation came into view, a welcome sight to Mbutu's eyes, and beyond it wide fields of maize, beans, sweet-potatoes, sorghum, and tobacco, in some of which negro women were at work. They looked curiously at the closed litter as it passed, and then with one consent flung down their clumsy implements and followed at the end of the line, behind the spearmen.

Passing through these extensive plantations, the procession arrived at a wide open space on which a herd of splendid long-horned oxen were tethered. The katikiro explained that these were the chief's own cattle, the animals belonging to the rest of the community being kept beyond the southern extremity of the village. Then they came to a number of huts made of grass and wattles, with untidy haycock roofs coming nearly down to the ground, and low doorways. The population had so largely increased that these huts had been built outside the village stockade, which at last came into sight, surmounting a steep acclivity. The ascent was by a narrow path, running straight up the incline, with a deep depression of rough land on the left, and on the right a banana-plantation. There was a gate in the stockade, and at this Mbutu saw a large crowd gathered. In front, was a group of young boys, their graceful forms almost bare of clothing, the foremost of them being Mwonga, the chief's young brother. Behind this group stood Barega himself among his principal men, all dressed in their ceremonial array for the occasion. Tom was quite unconscious of the gorgeousness of the finery there displayed in his honour, for during the day he had patently become worse, and Mbutu feared that he had reached the village only to find a grave. As the procession reached the gates formal greetings were exchanged between Mwonga the mutuma and the first spearman.

"Is it well?"

"It is well."

"Ah!"

"Ah!"

"Um!"

"Um!"

Such was the dialogue, a conversation in those regions never ending without a number of sighs and grunts. Then the group of boys parted, and the chief came forward. Over his woolly tufts of hair he wore a cap of antelope-skin, adorned with a mighty crest of cock's feathers, and across his breast was slung a broad shoulder-belt of leopard-skin, from which depended a miscellaneous assortment of the tags and tassels of fetish mysteries. He stepped forward with a splendid air of dignity. The katikiro then advanced to the head of the procession, and removed the fillets from his hair as a sign of respect. Then ensued another brief dialogue.

"Hast thou slept well?"

"I have slept well."

"Very well?"

"Very well."

"Very well indeed?"

"Very well indeed."

"I am thy servant."

"Thou art my servant."

"Ma!"

"Ma!"

"Mum!"

"Mum!"

And the grunting being finished, the chief went up to the litter, and, discarding his array, which seemed to irk him, he bent over to look at his sick visitor. He turned, and beckoned to the medicine-man, who all the time had stood a little behind, scowling darkly, for he felt by no means tenderly towards the white youth who had saved Barega from the Arabs, and thereby tumbled down the short-lived authority of Murasi. He stepped forward at the chief's bidding, and pulled a preternaturally solemn face as he scanned the unconscious Englishman. He shook his head, causing his fantastic head-dress of skin and feathers to make strange gyrations, and the wooden charms about his neck to clatter as they knocked together. Fingering the tufts of fetish-grass dangling from a string across his shoulder, he gravely announced that the muzungu would surely die. Mbutu had been anxiously watching the man of mystery, and he shuddered as he heard his master's doom. But the katikiro shrugged his shoulders behind Mabruki's back, and the chief himself, in a tone of petulant annoyance, bade the medicine-man retire. Then the procession was re-formed, and, amid a crowd of nearly two thousand, mingled Bahima and Bairo, men, women, and children, the whole population having turned out to see the wonderful white man who had given their chief back to them, Tom was carried to the centre of the village, where the katikiro's hut, standing nearest to the chief's, had been assigned to him. The katikiro was the

essence of good-nature; and when Barega ordered him, in conjunction with the mwobisi wamarwa (his cup-bearer), and the muchumbi wanyama (his chief cook), to provide everything necessary for the white man's comfort, he went smiling to do his master's behest.

A fortnight passed away, and during that time Tom hovered between life and death. As day followed day, and Mbutu, worn almost to a skeleton with watching and anxiety, saw no change in his master's condition, he felt the bitterness of despair. Mabruki offered to make medicine and employ all the mysteries of his art. He produced one day a gourd filled with mead, in which a kind of hay had been steeped for twenty-four hours. Acting on the advice of the katikiro, who had become his bosom friend, Mbutu accepted the offering with profuse thanks; but as soon as Mabruki had turned his back, the katikiro advised the boy to throw the liquor away, though he refused to say plainly why. From that time Mbutu maintained a still more jealous guard over his master. He kept the hut spotlessly clean, renewing every day the grass that covered the floor, and doing all that he could, by changing the arrangement of the skins and calico sheets upon the rough clay settle, to render Tom's position easy.

Thus the weary days went by. For a short period each day Tom was conscious, alive to the presence and the attentions of Mbutu and his friend Msala the katikiro. At such times he would swallow a little goat-broth, or an egg beaten up in milk, relapsing into unconsciousness again. He was too ill to think; he was only conscious of terrible weakness and pain. He could not sit up, could scarcely move his arms, and when it was necessary to change his position, Mbutu had to lift him. One morning, realizing more clearly than before the dreadful prostration of his body, he was possessed of a presentiment that he would die.

"I shan't bother you much longer," he said faintly to Mbutu. "When I am gone you'll find my uncle and tell him all about it, won't you?"

Mbutu could not speak for the lump in his throat. At this moment the katikiro entered, bringing a fresh gourd of banana wine. Mbutu poured a little between his master's lips, and watched him in an agony of suspense. Tom opened his eyes.

"I should like to thank the chief," he said. "Ask that good Msala to fetch him."

The katikiro soon returned with the chief, and they stood at the foot of the settle, their intelligent faces expressing a real sympathy with the sufferer. He tried to speak to them, but his voice failed. Barega advanced and clasped his hand. A strange drowsiness was stealing upon him; with a strong effort he moved his lips again.

"Chief," he said, "I thank you for your kindness. If ever you--"

But the sentence remained unfinished, a dark cloud seemed to come between his face and the chief's; his eyes closed, and the silence was only broken by

an irrepressible sob from Mbutu.

CHAPTER XII

Big Medicine

Barega's Village--The Cavern in the Cliff--Mutterings--Under a Cloud--The Bell and the Basket--A Challenge--In the Lists--A Palpable Hit--Vae Victis

For twenty-four hours Tom lay stark and motionless in one position, the flush in his cheeks and his quick breathing showing that he was still alive. Then, as the morning sunlight entered by the narrow doorway, he opened his eyes. Mbutu was in the act of spreading new and fragrant grass upon the floor.

"Mbutu!" came a faint voice from the settle. The boy flung down the grass and ran to his master.

"I am terribly hungry," said Tom.

Mbutu looked for a moment incredulous.

"I am indeed. I think I shall get well after all."

"Neyanzi-gé!" cried Mbutu with a shout of joy, his emotion finding expression in his native tongue. "Neyanzi-gé! I praise too much, sah! I fank too much!"

He was indeed bubbling, over with thankfulness. He went out of the hut and joyously spread the good news. In a few moments the whole camp knew that the muzungu was recovering. The chief ordered Bugandanwe, the big drum, to be struck, and arranged a spear-dance for the evening. A goat was instantly killed to make fresh soup, and some of the spearmen who had carried Tom to the village brought him voluntary offerings of bananas and sweet-potatoes. Even at this moment of excitement the chief displayed an amount of tact which, characteristic as it is of his race, seemed in strange disaccord with the European idea of the negro. He refrained from visiting Tom, and strictly commanded that no one except Mbutu, not even the katikiro, should go inside the hut on any pretence until the invalid's recovery was assured. As for the katikiro himself, he beamed on everybody, and, observing the dark look on the face of the medicine-man, whose prestige was bound to suffer somewhat from the failure of his prediction, he smiled still more broadly. He had no love for Mabruki, and, being a man of shrewd sense, nourished a strong suspicion that he was a humbug; but being also a discreet man, he was very careful never to give verbal expression to his thought.

From that time Tom grew slowly better. At first his limbs seemed paralysed, and he suffered intense pain from bed-sores; but the good food and Mbutu's careful nursing worked improvement day by day. He was soon strong enough to receive short visits from Barega and Msala, and on the tenth day was so far recovered as to have himself carried out before the sun was hot into the fresh air, well wrapped up in leopard and antelope skins, and sheltered by an awning. A week later he first ventured to walk, leaning on Mbutu's arm, and he laughed with something of his old light-heartedness when he saw what thin sticks his legs had become. The few paces from his bed to the outside of the hut seemed a matter of immense labour. But new strength came daily, and in three weeks he was strong enough to walk unassisted through the village.

Those three weeks had not been wasted. He got Mbutu to teach him the language, and was intensely amused at the chief's gasp of amazement at being one day addressed in his own tongue. He obtained also a great stock of information about the habits and customs of the people. Remembering his long-standing promise to gratify Mbutu's appetite for stories, he drew on his memory for tales of war and adventure, and found that nothing pleased the boy better than the old, old story of the fight between the Pigmies and the Cranes. In return, Mbutu told him legends of the country: the meaning of the Hyena's cry; why the Leopard catches his victim by the throat; and how the Hare outwitted the Elephant. And Tom at last heard the story of the Uncle and the Crocodile.

The village itself, with its surroundings, was a subject of considerable interest for Tom. From Mbutu he had learnt that a Bahima village usually contained some twenty huts, with a total population of perhaps a hundred and fifty. But Barega, as the place was called after the name of its chief, was by comparison quite a large town. It was built upon a gentle slope, rising from the north gate, by which Tom had entered, for some five hundred yards up a hill-side. On its north-eastern boundary, extending for some hundred and fifty yards, there was a sheer precipice about two hundred and fifty feet deep, partly overhanging a large open space of prairie-like land. Through the centre of the village meandered a clear streamlet two feet broad, flowing gently downward from south-west to north-east, and escaping in a light cascade over the precipice. About sixteen yards before it reached its outlet, the brook passed through a large reservoir sunk six feet in the ground, in which the water was always fresh and pure because of its constant flow. The chief's hut, a round structure of sticks and wattles, plastered with bluish clay ornamented with designs in white kaolin, stood amid a ring-fence in the centre of the village, and in an adjoining courtyard a perennial spring bubbled up, joining the streamlet outside the fence. The katikiro's hut, where Tom was located, was placed a few yards from the chief's, and the rest of the thatched dwellings were arranged in two streets round the whole circuit of the village. A

thick and well-kept stockade encircled the place, broken by only two gates, north and south. There were some four hundred huts in all, and the population consisted of about five hundred of the aristocratic Bahima, whose only occupation was tending cattle and hunting, and nearly fifteen hundred menial Bairo, who grew what crops were required, chiefly for their own consumption, and also took part in the larger hunting-expeditions.

The unusual size of the village was explained by its situation. Being near the edge of the forest, within the range of the depredations of Arabs and pigmies, it had become, during the rule of Barega, a sort of harbour of refuge for people of kindred stock. Barega had won an immense reputation for miles around as a dauntless warrior; he had more than once inflicted trifling defeats on wandering bands of raiders; spearmen with their families had put themselves under his protection; and the consequence was that a number of people which, in other parts of Central Africa, might have been spread over fifteen square miles in scattered hamlets, was now collected on a space not much more than a quarter of a mile square. The plantations were all, save for one large patch of bananas, on the north side, nearer the forest, while the cattle, huge herds of oxen, sheep, and goats, had their grazing-grounds to the south.

As he walked through the village, Tom met none but smiling faces. Everybody seemed pleased that the rescuer of the chief was restored to health. Ere many days passed, his usual escort was a throng of naked youngsters, who gazed with awe at his tall gaunt figure, and scampered off in a panic if he happened to turn round and look at them. Before long, however, his form lost its terrors, and he became the idol of all the children in the village. As he grew stronger, he was never tired of romping with them, showing them simple tricks, and finding endless amusement for himself in setting them to play at English games. "If games make men of us," he thought, "why not of black youngsters too?"

"'Pon my word, Mbutu," he said one day, "I believe I could make something of these little beggars if I had them for a year. Look at those little chaps over there, with sticks over their shoulders, marching exactly like a squad of recruits. Uncle Jack would go into fits if he saw them. I shall have some funny things to tell him by and by."

As he gained strength Tom made long excursions in the surrounding country. In these jaunts he was always attended by Mbutu, under whose tuition he made rapid progress in Central African woodcraft, and the thousand artifices with which semi-civilized man carries on his more or less successful struggle with the elemental forces of nature.

As a boy, crags and cliffs had always had a strange fascination for him; and for hours together, while still too weak to walk more than a few yards at a time, he would watch the birds circling around the spur at the north-eastern extremity

of the village. He noticed that hundreds of these birds disappeared into a narrow cleft, which seemed from the base of the cliff to be no more than a couple of feet in height. For some days he was content to note the fact, but as his strength returned, he felt the impulse of a born cragsman to explore the cleft. It was clearly a hazardous undertaking, for the spot in question was some two hundred feet above the ground, and the face of the cliff was almost perpendicular. Above the cleft the precipice jutted out at a considerable angle, rendering any attempt to reach it from above impossible. There were, however, traces of a narrow ledge along the face of the cliff, running from the desired spot for some distance parallel with the ground, and then sweeping gently downwards to a point some fifty feet above the surface, where it suddenly ceased. Tom resolved to attempt the ascent, and not all the entreaties of Mbutu could turn him from his purpose. Armed with an improvised alpenstock, and a grappling-hook to aid him in clinging to the face of the cliff, he reached the ledge with some difficulty, owing to the loose nature of the soil. But once on the ledge his progress was more rapid, and in less than half an hour from the start he found himself at the entrance of an extensive cavern in the side of the cliff. The opening was, for the most part, hidden from view by a large mass of loose rock that had fallen from the roof. The slope of the cavern led upward, and although he soon found himself in darkness, Tom was surprised to find that the air was quite pure. At the expense of his shins, he groped his way upwards, disturbing on the way innumerable bats and birds, which cannoned against him in a panic rush for the open air. After some thirty yards of toilsome progress he came to a sudden stop, discovering as he did so the reason why the cavern had none of the vault-like stuffiness which he associated with many similar adventures at home. Through a cleft in the rock ahead filtered a thin beam of light, but there was no passage even for Tom's lithe frame, wasted though it was by a month's illness. Tom was curious to know at what point of the cliff he had arrived, and, returning to the opening of the cavern, he made signs to Mbutu to betake himself to the hill overhead.

Again retracing his steps, Tom thrust his alpenstock through the narrow opening, and shouted to attract Mbutu's attention, to the complete discomfiture of the bolder spirits among the feathered inmates of the cavern, which had clung to their homes throughout this alarming episode. Mbutu's quick ears easily caught the signal, and he had no difficulty in discovering the cleft, which proved to be only a few feet from the stockade. Tom then returned by the road he had come, well satisfied with this little adventure, which came as a welcome break in his enforced idleness.

A day or two after this, Tom said to Mbutu:

"The people here are exceedingly kind, and I have learnt a great deal that is extremely interesting; but we can't stay here for ever. I should think in another

week I'll be strong enough to make tracks, eh?"

"Sure nuff, sah. Nyanza ober dar;" he pointed almost due east; "chief send men too; help sah 'long."

"As a sort of escort, you mean, for I don't want to be carried again. I shan't forget that time in the forest, Mbutu, nor how much I owe to you. I feel years older, somehow; and, by the by, d'you think there's such a thing as a razor in the village? I can't see myself, having no looking-glass, but I feel that during that illness my face has got a trifle downy."

"No razor, sah; Bahima pluck hair out. Muzema-wa-taba do it for sah."

"That's the chief's pipe-lighter, isn't it? No, thanks! let him continue lighting his master's pipe. Talking of that, since everybody smokes here, women included, I feel rather out of it without a pipe too; but really their tobacco is so--well, so intensely aromatic that I don't care to risk it. How that medicine-man scowls at me, by the way." Mabruki had just passed them. "I am extremely sorry to have been the unconscious means of upsetting his apple-cart; and I wish he'd see reason and make friends."

"No like medicine-man," said Mbutu hurriedly, looking over his shoulder at the strange figure departing.

"I wonder what he does in those little fetish-huts all round the village," added Tom. "Come now, d'you think he'd be pleased if I asked him for one of those wooden charms I've seen him gibbering over?"

"Nebber, nebber, sah," returned the boy earnestly. "Sah white man; no want dem things; sah laugh inside."

"Oh, it was only to please the man!--Here's our friend Msala coming. I wonder why the light of his countenance is gone for once."

The katikiro did indeed look unusually grave as he came up. In answer to Mbutu's enquiry, the regular formula "Is it well?" he replied that it was certainly not well, for he had just discovered that one of his best oxen, as well as two of the kasegara's, had died mysteriously during the night. He could not account for it; they had shown no signs of sickness, and none of the other animals were affected. The devil Magaso had hitherto confined his attentions to bananas; it seemed strange if he had suddenly become a destroyer of oxen. One of his Bairo herdsmen, said the katikiro, suggested that Muhoko, another evil spirit, had paid a flying visit to the village; but this suggestion he treated with scorn; he couldn't imagine a Bairo devil having the impudence to interfere with Bahima property. Altogether, the usually genial official was decidedly upset.

"Perhaps they've got poison somehow," said Tom.

Poison! It was unheard-of. The beasts would not of their own accord eat anything poisonous, and who should want to poison them?

"Perhaps someone has a grudge against you and the kasegara."

Against him, the katikiro! It was impossible. Wasn't he a friend to everyone, never bad-tempered, never greedy, never in anybody's way? The kasegara--oh! there might well be a grudge against him, for he thought a great deal too much of himself, talked a great deal too volubly at the village palavers, and had yet to learn that he was inferior to the katikiro after all.

"No doubt," said Tom, inwardly amused at the whole affair. "Some enemy of the kasegara, then, has paid him out by poisoning two of his cattle, and got rid of one of yours too, by mistake. All cats are gray in the dark, you know."

This explanation somewhat consoled the katikiro, when a Bahima equivalent for the proverb had been found; and then, with Mbutu's assistance, he engaged in animated conversation with Tom about the prime minister of the Great White King, whom he was very eager to emulate.

The death of the cattle passed from Tom's mind, but two days later the whole camp was in an uproar at the discovery that no fewer than six other oxen had died in the same mysterious way. Tom, as he went with Mbutu for his daily walk round the village, was surprised to find that the people looked much less pleasantly on him than usual. The change was shown in more than looks. He beckoned to a handsome little boy of four, a special favourite of his, and the child was running to him when he was checked by a sharp call from his mother, who sent him howling into her hut.

"This looks as though we're outstaying our welcome, Mbutu," said Tom. "Perhaps we had better arrange to start in a couple of days, when the chief gets back from the hunt. I think I'm strong enough to manage the journey if we don't have to hurry."

That night, soon after Mbutu had settled to sleep in his usual place just inside the doorway of his master's hut, he felt the stealthy touch of a hand upon his shoulder. He sprang up, wide awake in an instant. It was the katikiro's voice that spoke to him, and asked him to come out for a little conversation. Surprised at his choosing such a time, Mbutu followed him to the hut in which he had for the time taken up his abode, and there, in low tones, Msala explained the mystery of the villagers' changed attitude.

It was due to the medicine-man, he said. That individual had been for some time doing all he could to stir up the people against the white man, but had met with little success, so confident were they that their chief would never have made a friend of a man likely to harm them. But the loss of the cattle had now given Mabruki a strong leverage. He had gone about among the villagers, declaring that the Buchwezi, the spirits of their ancestors, had revealed to him most positively that the white man was the cause of all their recent losses. The katikiro scouted the suggestion, and had determined to show his friendliness towards Tom by acquainting him with the origin of the hostile movement. He advised Mbutu to

lose no time in getting his master away from the village, for if the infatuation got a thorough hold of the people, even the protection of the chief would be quite unable to save their lives.

Mbutu returned to the hut in a state of unconquerable nervousness. After a sleepless night, he gave his master the information he had received.

"What bosh!" cried Tom, laughing. "What a fool the medicine-man must be! I don't see what he has to gain by putting this on to me. Supposing he worked up the people to tear me to pieces, he couldn't get rid of Barega, and Murasi would be as far from being chief as ever."

"No, no, sah," said Mbutu, "him say sah kill oxen; berrah well. Chief say bosh; berrah well. Black men say no bosh; chief fool; white man him master; bad chief; must hab nudder chief. Oh yes! dat what medicine-man say!"

"I see; you mean he'll hit at the chief through me. Very well; we'll be off as soon as the chief returns; he shan't suffer loss of prestige through me."

On the second day after this, early in the morning, the chief returned from a hunting-expedition, in high feather at having secured several magnificent tusks of ivory. But his jubilation was changed to terrible wrath when he was met by the news that two of the finest of his Hima bulls were dead. The Bahima are intensely proud of their cattle, and any injury to them is most bitterly resented. When Barega heard that his own loss was only the climax of similar losses among his principal officers, he blazed forth in fury. He threatened to chop off everybody's head, but contented himself with summoning his household officials, along with the medicine-man and other important tribesmen, to a palaver. At this it was decided, after very little discussion, that next day a great smelling-out ceremonial should be held. The duty of conducting this important and mystic rite naturally fell upon Mabruki, who at once went off with a gleeful look of satisfaction to make the necessary preparations. As soon as he found an opportunity, the katikiro went to Tom's hut, and urged him to fly instantly. The medicine-man would assuredly pitch on him as the worker of this evil spell on the cattle, and nothing could then save him.

"Why should he? What have I done to him?"

Then, without making an explicit statement, Msala hinted that Mabruki was bent on the white man's destruction, and had himself poisoned the oxen to that end.

"And you expect me to run, eh?" said Tom. "No, my friend, I'll see this through. I'm not going to abscond, and let that ass bray."

Mbutu had still sufficient superstition to be greatly alarmed at hearing the medicine-man called an ass. But the katikiro was greatly tickled when the boy reluctantly interpreted the opprobrious term, and he went away chuckling and clacking the native word kapa between his lips with much enjoyment. He had no

objection to other people calling Mabruki names.

Early next morning the adult population assembled in a huge circle at the south end of the village, waiting for the mysterious ceremony to begin. There was an absence of the light-hearted chatter that goes on usually in a company of negroes; they were too much awe-stricken at the occasion. At length the principal officials took their places, and the chief, in full dress, looking very grim in his leopard-skin mantle and antelope cap, seated himself on a rough stool, a large elephant's tusk being held on each side of him. Then he gave the order to beat the drums; the great wooden instruments sent forth deep-booming notes from their ox-hide heads, and the medicine-man appeared.

He cut a most extraordinary figure. His fat legs and arms were smeared with white kaolin; he wore a belt of cowries with bunches of fetish-grass dangling all round it; on his head there was a remarkable head-dress of feathers, and his face was hidden by a fantastic grimacing mask. In one hand he carried a bell, in the other a basket. He walked slowly into the circle, treading gingerly, like a cat on hot bricks, and halted in the centre of the silent crowd. Then the chief ordered the katikiro to proclaim the reason for holding the assembly. Msala made an oration lasting fully half an hour, and licked his lips and slapped his thighs in thorough enjoyment of his own eloquence. Then was the turn of the medicine-man. In a hollow, sepulchral, and unsteady voice he began to recite an incantation of the abracadabra sort. As he progressed he worked himself up into a state of frenzy. Then, depositing his basket and bell on the ground, he burned a few bunches of specially-prepared grass which sent forth a nauseating smell. Moving to the immediate left of the chief, he began to make the circuit of the crowd, ringing his bell as he went. Save for the dong of the bell, there was a silence as of death; the natives, from the chief downwards, kept their eyes fixed on the circulating medicine-man, and not even the bleating of a calf, which had strayed into the village and poked its nose over the shoulder of one of the women, brought the faintest shadow of a smile to their faces, though the animal's mild stare of wonderment almost convulsed Tom. Round went Mabruki, coming nearer to the spot where Tom stood on the right of the chief. Mbutu's knees were knocking together; he gave a gasp of relief when the medicine-man passed him. Suddenly Mabruki stopped; he was opposite to Tom, three yards away. He flourished his bell up and down frantically, but no sound came from it. A groan went round the circle; the chief turned and gave Tom an anxious and startled look, and Mbutu had gone gray about the lips.

Without a word the medicine-man returned to the centre of the circle. Laying down the bell, he took up the basket and again walked round the throng, removing the lid of the basket as he came opposite each individual. He arrived at Tom, who was standing now with his hands in his pockets, looking on with a

smile of amusement mingled with contempt. There, though Mabruki apparently pulled with all his strength at the lid of the basket, it refused to come off. Angry cries arose from all parts of the circle; some of the men sprang up and shook their spears menacingly, but the medicine-man called for silence and began a frenzied denunciation of the white man. It was he who had destroyed the much-prized cattle; the Buchwezi had declared it. Before him the bell would not ring, before him the basket-lid was immovable. The spirits had given their doom; let the white man die!

Tom still stood with his hands in his pockets, now gazing grimly at his denouncer. Inclined at first to pooh-pooh the whole business, he saw that the people were impressed by the medicine-man's harangue, and that the chief was troubled and perplexed. "Poor fellow!" thought Tom, "I suppose he'll have to give in." It was of no use his merely denying the charge, he very well knew. It was equally useless to engage in a war of words with Mabruki. It was a time for action, prompt and vigorous. His resolution was instantly taken. Almost before the last words were out of Mabruki's mouth, he stepped before the chief, bidding Mbutu accompany him, and asked to be allowed to speak. Then, in a clear confident voice, he began his first public speech, the words, unpremeditated as they were, pouring from his lips with a fluency that surprised him and taxed Mbutu's interpretative powers to the full.

"I am amazed, O Barega," he said, "that you, and the mighty tribe you rule, should be swayed by an ignorant, stupid humbug like Mabruki. Look at him, forsooth! He can't stand straight; he has been feeding his courage on tubs of museru till he is fuddled. He says I destroyed the cattle. Why should I, a stranger to whom you, O Barega, have shown so many kindnesses--why should I so basely return evil for your good, and bring death among those who brought me back to life? There is no sense in it. You believe your medicine-man? I don't care that for your medicine-man." (He walked slowly to the centre,--Mabruki, with eyes glaring through the mask, retreating before him,--and with two kicks sent the bell and the basket flying among the negroes, who watched him in dumb amazement.) "I will prove to you that his medicine is no medicine. To-morrow at sunset, do you, Barega, call your tribe together, and I will bring medicine to match against Mabruki's. Then shall you see whose medicine is the stronger; then shall you see that I am a true man, and know Mabruki for the sham he is. Shall it be so?"

A murmur of assent ran round the ring. Tom's dauntless bearing and confident words, a little amplified perhaps in places by his interpreter; above all, the fact that he had kicked the magic bell and basket without suffering instant hurt; had made their impression on the natives. And the negro dearly loves a show. The prospect of a similar but more novel entertainment entranced them. The medicine-man was in no condition to offer a protest; he had seized the oppor-

tunity to take frequent pulls at a gourd of museru, and, exhausted by his own violence, he now lay a fuddled, huddled heap on the ground. The chief, unfeignedly glad of the turn events had taken, consulted with his officers, and was strongly urged by the katikiro to agree to Tom's proposal. The trial of strength was fixed then for the evening of the following day, and the assembly broke up. Now all tongues were loosed; every incident in the strange scene was canvassed by two thousand chattering negroes. Some openly expressed their belief that the fearless white man would effectually squelch the unhappy discredited medicine-man, while others still had confidence in Mabruki, and expected that even yet the white man would smart for his impiety.

Tom spent the rest of that day in seclusion. He was making medicine, was Mbutu's invariable answer to enquiries. The white man was making medicine!--the word flew round the village, and even the most sceptical began to believe there was something in it. Just before sunset Tom sent for the katikiro, who had been bursting with curiosity to know what was going on in his own hut. Darkness fell, and the stars appeared, and yet he remained with Tom. The chief, in the hut adjoining, once or twice fancied he heard the sounds of stifled laughter. Unable to contain himself, he went quietly to Tom's hut, and crept in before Mbutu had time to interpose. Tom was standing in the middle, with arms akimbo, smiling down at the katikiro, who was sitting on the floor fairly shaking with half-suppressed merriment. He got up rather sheepishly when he saw his chief looking grimly at him, and sidled out of the hut. Tom turned to the chief and said cheerfully:

"I was only finishing my medicine-making, chief. Everything is ready now."

"Ah, um! Are you quite sure that your medicine will be stronger than Mabruki's? If not, I would urge you to flee at once; I will send trusty men with you. For if Mabruki prevails to-morrow my people will claim a terrible revenge."

"Don't be alarmed, chief. I will answer for my medicine. I hope your sleep won't be disturbed; as for me, I have been working hard, and want a good night's rest."

Very early next morning the villagers began to assemble on the site of the previous day's ceremony. Time does not exist for the negro; sunrise and sundown are his only periods, and the people were quite content to squat in a circle through all the long hot day. The crowd was larger than ever; all the boys and girls had been brought to see the show. Villagers, even, from outlying parts had come in, the news having spread with that wonderful speed which is one of the most striking phenomena in African life. Nor were the tongues of the people tied by any feeling of solemnity; on the previous day they might have been compared to the congregation in a cathedral, to-day they were like the spectators at a circus.

Sunset was the time fixed for the trial of strength. As the sun disappeared the officials came from their huts, the katikiro apparently relishing his recollec-

tion of the previous night's amusement, and failing lamentably to maintain the dignity of his office. The medicine-man was brought in; he had wisely laid aside his flummery, and looked more ghastly than ever in his coating of kaolin. The chief entered the ring, with his drummers and tusk-bearers, followed by Tom, and a score of torch-bearers ranged themselves around.

Just as Barega reached his place a man came dashing up the village from the northern gate, never pausing till he stood before the chief. It was one of the principal scouts. In breathless haste he stated that he had learned that a strong Arab force was advancing through the forest. It was bent on some great enterprise, for the caravan included thousands of slaves, carrying all the paraphernalia of a camp and large stores of provisions. It was by this time only twelve marches away, and was coming steadily in the direction of the village. The news went through the assembly in an instant, and silenced every tongue. The medicine-man straightened himself, and with something of his former assurance proclaimed that the white man was accountable, and that unless he were expelled or slain the village would fall an easy prey to the enemy. He evidently welcomed the diversion, and was preparing for a long harangue, when Tom, advancing, stilled the gathering murmurs with an imperious gesture.

"Chief," he said, "heed not what the medicine-man says. It is a trial of strength between our magic to-day; if his medicine proves the stronger, turn me out or slay me; but if mine, then I promise you I will not leave you till we have made a good account with your Arab foes. I know the Arabs; I have fought them; I have been a prisoner among them and escaped; I saved you from them. Is it a bargain?"

Loud shouts of assent broke from the whole company, and the chief, with a dignified inclination of the head, said: "It shall be so." Then, amid breathless silence, the trial of strength commenced.

Tom had resolved from the outset that he would make no attempt to persuade the natives that Mabruki's medicine was mere vanity and hollowness. Superstitions generations old could not be banished in a night. His object was to show, not that the medicine did not exist, but that it was poor medicine, quite unworthy of an important village, and not to be compared with the medicine he himself had at command. He began with a short speech in which he recited the history of the affair up to the present, finding it rather difficult to get on without the interpreting aid of Mbutu, who was not at hand. He laid stress on the strange disaster that had befallen the primest cattle, and reminded the people how the medicine-man had professed to discover that he was the cause, if not the agent, of the death of the bulls. If this accusation was merely the outcome of spite and hatred, the Bahima would know how much reliance to place on it. If, however, it were really due to the operation of Mabruki's magic--here Tom turned swiftly

toward the medicine-man, and cried: "We shall see what faith can be placed on the words of an ignoramus like this. Bahima and Bairo, look!"

He seized the bell, which the medicine-man had placed on the basket at his feet. Mabruki stood mute and motionless with astonishment as Tom, ringing the bell with the same large gestures as his enemy, began to march round the circle. Before he had walked ten paces Tom found, as he had expected, that by a simple mechanical contrivance the clapper could be fixed at the will of the performer, and the trick had not been discovered only because no one else in the village had dared to touch the magic bell. He walked on solemnly round the circle until he came to the place where Mabruki stood scowling, and then, though he agitated the bell with more than ordinary violence, not a sound came from it.

[image]

Tom surprises Mabruki

There was for a moment a silence as of death. Then a low growl rumbled round the throng. The katikiro laughed, the chief frowned ominously, as Tom, keeping a wary eye on Mabruki, flung the bell contemptuously at his feet. The medicine-man was livid with wrath. The scorn of his enemy, the murmurs of the spectators, the despiteful usage of his fetish, whose terrors were now gone for ever, were too much for him. With a snarl of rage the burly negro hurled himself at Tom, aiming a vicious blow at him with a strangely-carved fetish staff he carried in his hand. It was the very move Tom had intended to provoke; if only Mabruki could be goaded to attack him he was confident of the issue. His confidence appeared to be shared by Msala, who, alone of that vast throng, seemed to be excited rather with suppressed merriment than with any emotion of doubt or fear. The crowd gazed open-mouthed, for Mabruki was to all appearance easily able to overpower the slim stripling opposed to him. But as the big man lurched forward Tom stepped nimbly aside and evaded the blow. Before Mabruki could recover he found his wrist firmly grasped, and was jerked sharply forward, his elbow being gripped as in a vice by Tom's left hand. Then Tom brought into play a trick of Japanese wrestling he had learnt from a ship's engineer, who had taken advantage of visits to the island empire to make a study of methods unrecognized and unknown in Cumberland and Cornwall. The medicine-man instinctively resisted when he felt the forward pull. Instantly reversing his movement, Tom pushed his opponent's elbow up with the left hand while pulling his hand outwards and downwards with the right. At the same time he placed his leg behind his opponent's knee, and before the astonished magician could realize what

was happening, with a sharp jerk he was thrown on to his back, the earth seeming to shake under his seventeen stone of corpulence.

The whole operation had not occupied more than a few seconds. The medicine-man in an African village is rather feared than beloved; he has countless ways of making his dreaded tyranny felt. When, therefore, the people saw the man whose power they had held in awe so rapidly overthrown, apparently without any exertion on the part of his opponent, a great shout of mocking laughter burst from them. The katikiro was bent double with delight, and even Barega's face relaxed its habitual gravity, Mabruki, with no breath left in his unwieldy body, thoroughly cowed, was in no condition to renew the attack. He still lay upon the ground as Tom explained that he had turned Mabruki's medicine upon him, and shown that white medicine had enabled himself to do what no other man among them, not even the strongest, could have accomplished. Mabruki had brought his humiliation upon himself.

"But this," he added, "is mere trifling. In my country we leave such simple things to the children. If you wish to see what the white man's magic is like, pay heed to what I am about to do. And I warn you, be satisfied with that, lest worse befall."

He walked slowly to the centre of the circle, where the huge king-drum was placed. The glare of the torches lit up the hundreds of eager faces, all gazing at him with eyes opened to their widest. Even the katikiro, who had shown no surprise at the previous feats, looked on now with an air of fearful expectancy.

"Put out your torches!" cried Tom.

One by one the lights were extinguished. The whole village was covered with the black darkness of a moonless tropical night. For half a minute there was absolute silence; then, taking the drum-stick, Tom smote the drum with three measured strokes.

Boom! boom! boom!

The hollow sounds rolled away and died in the distance. Nothing could be heard but the quick pants of the waiting crowd. A light breeze had sprung up, grateful after the day's heat, and from far in the distance came faintly the trumpet note of an elephant, followed by the quick bark of a hyena. Again Tom struck the drum.

Boom! boom! boom!

A moment later he noticed a glow in the tree-tops of a plantation three-quarters of a mile to the west. The silent throng was still looking towards him, trying to pierce the darkness. The glow increased rapidly in brightness, defining itself as a globe of fire.

B-r-r-rrrrrrrr!

A tremendous roll from the drum woke rumbling echoes all around. Point-

ing dramatically with his drum-stick into the sky, Tom cried: "Behold!"

The crowd turned as one man. A huge blazing globe was advancing slowly towards them out of the darkness. The effect was stupendous. For a moment the throng was inarticulate with dread. Then murmurs of fear arose. Some of the women shrieked; many of the children buried their faces in their mothers' bosoms. Most of the men sank into their customary abject attitude of supplication; others were too terrified to move, and gazed upwards in stupefaction at the advancing and ascending ball of fire. It came slowly along on the breeze, passed almost directly over the village, then mounted higher and higher into the sky as it drifted eastward. The crowd watched it in awe-struck silence as it grew smaller and smaller in the distance, and at last disappeared as a tiny speck on the horizon.

A gasp of relief rose from the throng. Barega cried again for torches; by their light Mabruki could be seen shaking like an aspen, the evidence of superior medicine having overpowered him altogether. Among the people there was the inevitable reaction. Their fear being removed, they turned against the medicine-man and assailed him with vehement cries of scorn. Barega sent for his executioner, and announced his immediate intention of having Mabruki's head. But Tom called aloud for silence, and beckoning Mbutu, who with the torches had suddenly appeared at his side, said:

"Barega and Barega's men," he said, "you have seen with your own eyes. You saw that with Mabruki's own bell I proved against him, if such childish folly can be called a proof, what he had proved against me. You saw that when he tried to fell me with his weighty fist, with a mere turn of the hand I laid him low. And now you have seen how, striking your own king-drum, Bugandanwe, I summoned a globe of fire from the trees yonder, and how it sailed away out of sight with a message to the morning chamber of the sun. The trial is made; who has the stronger medicine--Mabruki or I?"

"You, the muzungu!" shouted every creature in the throng.

"And do you, O Barega, any longer believe that I caused the death of your cattle?"

"No, no; I do not believe it. If any of my people believes it, he shall surely die!"

Barega glared round the circle of his trembling subjects, as if to dare any of them to confess himself a doubter.

"No one believes it," said Tom quickly. "Now I tell you this," he added, turning to Barega; "you will lose no more cattle, my friend. Your losses are due to Mabruki's bad medicine."

"I will have his head!" cried Barega furiously.

"Wait, my brother. Let me plead for him. What will his death avail? It will not bring back your cattle. No, it is for the strong to show mercy. What shall

be his doom? Let it be this, that he give to everyone who has lost cattle by this strange death one bull for every bull that died, you, O chief, to choose first among his beasts. And mark, if in the days to come any cattle die in the same way, let Mabruki give the owner two bulls for every one that so dies. My medicine is not concerned with cattle; but I think Mabruki has enough medicine left to preserve your cattle henceforth."

The suggestion met with instant approval, and Mabruki himself dared not raise a protest. As he slunk shamefaced away, the assembly broke up, to discuss the wonderful occurrences with shouting and laughter for hours afterwards.

Tom walked quietly back to his hut.

"You did it very well, Mbutu," he said.

Mbutu grinned.

"Like it berrah much, sah," he said; "jolly good bloony bloon."

"Yes; and we must never repeat the performance. We will not stale our big medicine, Mbutu."

The explanation of the wonderful event was simplicity itself.

When Tom had offered to pit himself against Mabruki, he had in his mind the trick of Japanese wrestling. But that was hardly sufficient, perhaps, to impress the people, and he resolved to attempt something even more startling. While thinking over the matter, he remembered how amazed he had been himself when, as a young child, he first saw a balloon. Could he make a fire-balloon? Suddenly he bethought him of a roll of Indian silk he had seen among the chief's possessions. Surely that would provide the very material he required. He persuaded the chief to give him a few lengths from the roll, and during the time of his seclusion in the hut he had, with Mbutu's assistance, cut the silk into strips, stuck them together with a natural gum obtained from trees near, stitched the seams together, smeared the whole surface with gum to make it air-tight, and bent a thin sapling to hold open the mouth of the balloon, with a light pan dangling from it to hold combustible material steeped in spirit. Mbutu had smuggled the balloon into the plantation on the previous night, while Tom was engaged in practising his wrestling trick on the katikiro. When the performance began with the ringing of the bell, Mbutu had inflated the envelope with hot air over a large charcoal fire, and at the second drum-signal had ignited the spirit-soaked material, and let the balloon rise.

Before Tom retired to rest that night, the katikiro came to him and humbly begged to know how he had made fire come from the tree-tops.

"Msala, my friend," said Tom, smiling, "that is my secret. We cannot all do everything; too much learning, like too much museru, might turn your head. Be satisfied with getting your cattle replaced, and take my word for it that you will

never lose your bulls in the same way again."

CHAPTER XIII

Blood-Brotherhood

Fortifying the Village--The Enemy at the Gate--An Attack at Dawn--Bridging the Trench--Fireballs--Invested

Tom's decisive victory over the medicine-man not only restored him to his former place in the estimation of the people, but raised him to a pitch of renown which he found somewhat embarrassing. Presents of all kinds were thrust upon him by the admiring villagers, and even the chief, who, though always affable, had nevertheless stood a little upon his dignity, now opened his heart to him without reserve. He showed him one day, hidden carefully under the floor of his hut, a magnificent collection of elephants' tusks, some being family heirlooms handed down from generation to generation, others the spoils of his own chase. And then he ventured to make a proposal which he said would once for all fix the confidence of his people in the white man. Would Tom become his blood-brother?

"Most happy, I'm sure," said Tom, who, however, looked a little blue when the details of the ceremony were told him by Mbutu. "I don't mind having my arm lanced, but I'm hanged if I'll lick his blood; no, I draw the line at that."

Barega assured him that a trifle like that need not stand in the way, and the ceremony was forthwith arranged. The people were again called together by tuck of drum. In the centre of the circle two mats of wild-cat skin were placed opposite to each other, and on these Tom and the chief sat cross-legged. The household officers stood around, holding shields and spears and swords over Barega's head. Then the katikiro made a small incision in the forearm of each, half-way between the hand and elbow, from which a little blood oozed. If the rite had been strictly observed, each would then have licked the blood of the other, but in deference to Tom's scruple, the chief was satisfied with their rubbing the cuts together, so that their blood was commingled. When this was done the katikiro began to knock two pieces of metal together, keeping up a monotonous tink, tink, tink, and talking all the time. He recited a sort of litany as the chief's representative: "If you want shelter, my hut is yours; if you are in trouble, my warriors are yours; if you are hungry, the food of my land is yours; if you ever make war upon me, if

you ever steal from me, if you ever wound me",--and so on, the if-clauses continuing for half an hour, "may you die!" Then Mbutu got up and followed in a similar strain on Tom's behalf, after which the chief presented Tom with a small cube of ivory, and Tom in return gave him the only thing he had of his own, a trouser-button. The blood-brothers then heartily shook hands, and the assembled multitude shouted the name by which the new brother was to be known among them--Okubokokuru, which, being interpreted, means "Strong in the Arm". Tom expressed his gratification at this mark of respect, but pleaded that his new name might be shortened; and the chief announced that his brother was to be officially known as Kuboko.

No further news had yet been received of the approaching enemy. Tom was longing to see a white face again, but he reflected that all his friends must now have given him up, and that a few days more would make little difference. Besides, he felt the military instinct alive in him. He was keen to set his wits once more against the Arab cunning, and when he seriously thought over it he did not regret his impulsive promise to stand by his new friends.

"Barega," he said, with a familiarity justified by his new relationship, on the day after the ceremony, "if we are to defeat these Arabs we must set about preparations in earnest. Your scout said they were twelve marches away; twelve has now become ten. We have ten days. How many fighting-men have you?"

The chief replied that he had one hundred and fifty Bahima spearmen, and four hundred and fifty Bairo, some of whom had spears, the rest bows and arrows. They all had small oval shields, made of light basket-work, with a large central boss of wood. Tom had already seen and examined their weapons in the course of his walks about the village. The Bahima spear had a long wooden shaft and an iron head with two blood-courses, one on each side of the central rib. The Bairo spear was of ruder construction, the head containing a depression on one side answering to a ridge on the other. The bow was about four feet long, with a string of sheep-gut, and the arrows, eighteen inches in length, had barbed heads.

"Not poisoned, I hope?" said Tom, as Barega called up a Muiro to show his weapon. He was answered in the negative. The quiver was a long tube of hard white-wood, with a wooden cap at each end, and was worn slung by a string across the shoulder. Striking designs had been burnt out in a kind of poker-work on the wood, and Tom was delighted with the artistic taste they displayed. Inside the quiver, besides some dozen arrows, a fire-stick was kept.

"Your arms are pretty serviceable so far as they go," said Tom. "You haven't any guns, I suppose?"

The chief produced a few old rusty flint-locks, along with the three muskets taken from the Arabs, but as he had no ammunition they were in any case useless.

"Well now, how is the village prepared to stand an assault? It is impregnable

on the north-east and east, I should say, owing to the precipice. The path up to the north gate is steep, and therefore an attack in that direction might be easily beaten off; but on the west and south, as well as on the south-east, your stockade, I am afraid, is easily scaleable. I would suggest that you dig a trench, Barega, outside the stockade, and fill it with water from the stream. And look here, don't you think you could make your men work? You'll never get things done if you leave them entirely to the women, and in my country, you know, we'd think precious little of a man who made his women do everything."

Stimulated by Tom's energy, the chief set the whole of his people to work. Unluckily, the Bahima not being an agricultural people, they had only their broad knife-blades to use, though the Bairo were well supplied with crude implements. Making the best of things, and impressing even the children into the task, Tom had the satisfaction, after eight days' strenuous labour, of seeing the vulnerable part of the stockade defended by a trench six feet deep and fifteen across. It was not carried right up to the stockade for fear of loosening the fencing, but the interval was planted with sharp stakes, forming a *chevaux-de-frise*. Under Tom's supervision a drawbridge of wattles was rapidly constructed and thrown over the trench at the southern gate. The huts outside the stockade, which would afford good cover for an enemy, were cleared away, the owners being accommodated with new huts within.

There were now only two days left before the Arabs, at the earliest, could arrive, and Tom, thinking over the probabilities and possibilities, and as yet ignorant of the size and composition of the Arab force, wondered whether the attack might resolve itself into a siege. It might of course be beaten back once for all; still, it was well to be prepared. He advised the chief, therefore, to lay in a large stock of provisions, both animal and vegetable. A good many cattle could at a pinch be herded inside the stockade, and the flesh of slaughtered animals could be kept sweet under running water, in little streamlets diverted from the brook, or preserved in pans of salt. Great quantities of bananas, potatoes, maize, and other crops were got in and stored in the village, until Tom was assured that there was enough food collected to feed the whole population for at least a month on full rations.

On the eleventh day, walking round once more with Barega, to see that nothing had been left undone, Tom observed that one precaution had been neglected. Three hundred yards to the south-east of the village there was a somewhat extensive banana plantation, bounded on the west by the brook. This would afford excellent cover to an attacking force armed with rifles, and it seemed to Tom that it ought to be cut down, a course he at once suggested to the chief. But Barega did not appreciate the tactical point involved, and refused to allow the plantation to be touched. Besides, as he said with some truth, there was barely

time to cut it down if the Arabs were to show themselves next day. Accordingly Tom had to remain satisfied with what he had achieved. He was indeed rather surprised at finding so many of his suggestions adopted without demur, and was inclined to ascribe it to Mbutu, who, as he discovered, was constantly singing his master's praises and dwelling on his brilliant fighting qualities. But he really owed much more to his own tact, and to the care with which he thought out his proposals before he placed them before Barega. No man is quicker than the African native to appreciate real force of character.

Scouts had been sent out to the north and east, the directions from which the Arabs were presumed likely to come--men familiar with the forest, who could be trusted to find food for themselves and remain invisible. No tidings had yet arrived of the enemy's near approach, but Tom did not allow the grass to grow under his feet. There were several smithies in the village, fenced off from the inhabited part, and here Tom kept the smiths constantly employed in sharpening spears and tipping new-made arrows. He found means also of still further improving his defences. Barega told him, as they were talking over their plans, that the Arab attack was almost certain to be made in a half-light, just before dawn. The question at once occurred to Tom: Could not the trench be disguised so that the enemy might flounder into it unawares? No sooner was the question put than the chief slapped his thigh, and cried: "Yes". In his hunting he frequently covered over his elephant-pits in such a way that the animals trod unsuspiciously upon what seemed to be solid earth, and fell helplessly into the hole. The same plan could be pursued now. No time was lost; bushels of light branches and twigs were speedily obtained from the woods and laid across the ditch, then covered with earth and rubbish until the surface, except to a most critical eye, could not be distinguished from the surrounding soil. Just before sunset, Tom walked all round the village, along the edge of the trench, and, from his inspection, he felt confident that a rapidly-moving enemy would never discover the trap.

The twelve days were past, and still there was no sign or news of the Arabs. Sentries were posted every night at short intervals inside the stockade, and more than once Tom himself went the rounds in the middle of the night to see that all was well. Late on the thirteenth day a scout came in, tired and famished, with the news that the Arabs were within two days' march. They had been harassed and delayed by pigmies, who had dogged them almost all the way, and had given cruel proofs of the sureness of their aim and the virulence of their poisons. Soon afterwards other scouts returned, confirming this information. Tom's eyes gleamed at the prospect of a stiff fight. He got the chief to call a council of his principal men, and to them he suggested a plan of operations.

"Brothers," he said, "it is agreed that you trust me. I am young, as you see; I have not fought so many fights as Barega here; my friend Msala is as brave as

a lion--either might well lead you to victory. But the white men--your cousins--have handed down from father to son many stories of great fights, and these are in my mind. Have I done well up to this time?"

"You have," was the ready and unanimous answer.

"Then hear me when I tell what, with your approval, I think we should do. The enemy will come up to our trench on the south and west; they will stumble into it and be thrown into confusion. I will lead a picked band of men out of the south gate, and my brother Barega another out of the north gate. We shall thus have the Arabs between us, and we will advance to meet each other, pressing them all the way. At the same time Msala will direct the warriors in the village to assail the enemy with a thick shower of spears and arrows, taking care to hit the Arabs, and not their own friends. Is it understood?"

The assembly grunted approval.

"Then, Barega, do you at once select a hundred of your steadiest men for yourself, and a hundred also for me, so that all things may be ready when the enemy appears."

The arrangements were rapidly made. Every warrior in the village had his appointed place; a number of the cattle were brought in and tethered within the stockades, the rest were driven away to the south under the charge of armed herdsmen, who were instructed to elude the enemy to the best of their ability.

On the next day the force in the village was swelled by the accession of two separate bands of Ruanda, whose hamlets had been destroyed by the Arabs, and who had flocked to the protection of Barega. The same evening the last of the scouts came in, with the news that the enemy had been hastening their march and were bound to arrive next day. He put their numbers at five thousand, but Tom knew enough of the African character to be assured that this estimate was far in excess of the actual number, and he took the information very quietly.

Now that an attack was imminent, he advised Barega to call a mass-meeting of the inhabitants. Standing in the midst of the circle of negroes, whose kind treatment of him forbade their being called savages, he felt a deep sense of his responsibility, and spoke with special seriousness.

"Bahima and Bairo," he said, "you are all my brothers and sisters. I believe that I am doing right in helping you to defeat the enemy who has caused so much misery to you and to all your race. Please God, we shall defeat them. We must all do our best--some to give orders, others to obey. My sisters, you will stay with your children in the middle of the village. The Arabs will have fire-sticks, and there is no need for any of you to run into danger. Your husbands will defend you, and strike hard for their homes."

Speeches at greater length were delivered by the chief and the katikiro. The people were deeply impressed; never had they gone to war in any such way be-

fore; and Tom on his side was struck with their intelligence, and the eagerness they showed to follow instructions so novel to them. He was a little uncertain of the steadiness of the Bairo, who were more impetuous and less docile than the Bahima; but they had been divided into companies under Bahima officers, and Tom himself had put them through a little drill in the brief intervals left by their task of fortifying the village. All that he feared was that they might break out in wild rushes, after the undisciplined negro's manner, and leave the stockade insufficiently defended.

Next morning, just as light was breaking, the sentries gave word that the enemy was advancing. Tom, waked by Mbutu out of a long quiet sleep, hastened to his post at the southern gate. For days he had been hammering it home into the negroes' heads that silence was a strong weapon on their side, but the negro cannot change his nature in a week, and as soon as the news had run through the camp, the eager warriors came clamorously out of their huts to the stockade. Tom bade them keep out of sight, and the enemy, advancing rapidly in crescent-shaped formation stretching from south-east to north-west, must have believed that the noise was merely the usual morning bustle in a large village. On they came, Arabs mingled with Manyema, in perfect silence and fair order, confident of finding easy access to their expected prize. The horns of the crescent reached the trench; twenty men at each extremity stepped heedlessly on to it, and instantly they were in the water, floundering beyond their depth. Loud cries of dismay filled the air; the rest of the force halted in amazement, scarcely able in the faint light to perceive what had happened. Then the deep boom of a drum rolled from the village, over the precipice, into the wooded plain.

Instantly a thick cloud of missiles flew from the stockade, arrows whizzed, spears hurtled through the air. At the same moment, Tom, with his hundred, sallied out from the southern gate, the men raising a fierce whoop of exultation. From the northern gate, after a barely perceptible interval, came an answering cry; and within the stockade the warriors, hurling their weapons at the centre of the Arab line, added their shouts to the din. The confusion of the Arabs was too great to permit of their firing a volley; a few separate slugs fell among the Bahima, and ill-aimed spears struck down a few. But the troops of Tom and Barega were pressing hard upon the extremities of their line; they were driven in towards the centre. An attempt was made by their leaders to rank them in some sort of order, but the necessity of facing two ways at once baffled their efforts; the Bahima were upon them in a wild charge, and with cries of mingled fright and disappointment they broke and ran.

With yells of triumph the Bahima dashed in pursuit. But the sun was now peeping, large and red, over a distant ridge, and by its light Tom saw a fresh and well-ordered body of men advancing to the support of the fugitives. Divining that

this was the Arab reserve, he ordered his drummer to beat the recall, at the very instant when the enemy, even at the risk of killing their own men, opened fire. The command was timely, for the Bahima, unaccustomed to the fire of muskets, already showed signs of trepidation. His drum was answered by the chief's, and the two bands retreated to their several gates, followed by the hostile force, their return being covered by a hot discharge of missiles from the stockade. After some hesitation, the enemy drew off to reconsider their plan of attack, pursued by a loud chorus of derisive yells.

Tom had not the heart to check the self congratulation of the people, who celebrated their victory with song and dance. Victorious, certainly, had they been, but Tom, cool in the midst of the excitement, had carefully scanned the opposing forces to estimate their strength, and he saw that Barega's warriors were greatly outnumbered. They were no more than six hundred fighting men all told, while the enemy, as nearly as he could tell, consisted of at least three times that number, some ninety of them being Arabs, and the rest Manyema. The success of the Bahima was evidently due solely to the surprise and confusion of the enemy, for, even with the advantage of the stockade, they could scarcely hope to outmatch a force so much larger, armed, moreover, as two hundred and fifty of them were, with muskets and rifles. The Bahima losses so far had been few; two men had been killed and five wounded, of whom two died later. Of the enemy, six Arabs and about thirty Manyema had been left upon the field, and others, doubtless, lay drowned at the bottom of the ditch. It was with some anxiety that Tom awaited the dawn of the next day. He passed a sleepless night, framing many conjectures as to the enemy's further operations, and thinking out plans for their discomfiture. But morning broke in silence; Tom wondered whether spear and shield were to remain idle. Looking over the stockade about ten o'clock, he saw a movement amid a clump of trees about half a mile up the slope to the south-west, and, carrying his eye downwards to the north-west, he observed similar evidences of activity in the thicker woods in that direction also. Before he had quite realized what this might portend, a large body of the enemy emerged from each clump, many of the men carrying what appeared to be a kind of trellis-work. Their object flashed instantly into Tom's mind; they were going to bridge the trench. Drums beat, and Bahima and Bairo rushed to the points threatened; but the enemy halted just out of range of their arrows, and, under cover of a phalanx of native shields, prepared to rush their extemporized bridge across the ditch.

Behind the stockade the defenders were keenly alert; Barega had command of the north-western section, and the katikiro, who, genial time-server as he was in peace, was a very paladin in war, commanded on the south-west. Seeing that all along the western boundary the defence was in good hands, Tom hastened to the south-east to assure himself that no danger need be feared in that direction.

Barely half a minute after he reached a smithy in the south-eastern corner, from the yard of which he could scan the whole country to the horizon, he saw a strong body of men spring out of the banana plantation he had vainly urged Barega to cut down. They, like their fellows on the other side, had with them a long piece of trellis-work. Evidently there was not a moment to lose. Tom despatched Mbutu to inform Barega of the danger; but so quickly did the enemy move, that in less than two minutes they had arrived at the edge of the ditch, flung the trellis bridge across, and begun to swarm over to the other side, nimbly evading the planted stakes.

Tom looked around. Only some ten men were within call. Summoning these to his assistance, he turned to defend the stockade. He had no weapon but the musket got in the forest, and that, in default of ammunition, he could only use as a club. By the side of the smith's rude anvil he saw a recently-sharpened sickle, with a handle eighteen inches long. This he seized, and sprang to his post again. Some twenty of the enemy, he saw, bore light scaling-ladders, hastily constructed since the previous fight. These they placed against the stockade and began to clamber up. There was a fierce hand-to-hand fight. Tom caught hold of the top of one of the ladders, on which two Arabs were ascending, and putting forth his utmost strength, flung it back so that it fell on the climbers. Some of the Bahima were thrusting their spears through interstices in the stockade, and cries of agony bore witness to their success. But for every man that fell another sprang up to take his place. Already several of the enemy had reached the tops of their ladders, and were firing, fortunately with erratic aim, at the panting defenders. Three, indeed, had clambered down on the inner side, and still there was no sign of the expected reinforcements. Tom had been slashing with his sickle in his right hand, and warding off with the musket in his left the blows of Arab swords and Manyema spears. Seeing three of the enemy within his lines, he was down in a moment at the foot of the stockade. One of the three he clubbed with his musket, and then, while Mbutu, who returned at this moment, fiercely engaged the second, he pressed hotly upon the third. Two of the Bahima were prostrate; the remaining eight were vainly attempting to stem the torrent now pouring over the palisade, and Tom was in the thick of the mêlée, laying about him doughtily. It was a tense moment; Tom and his little band were outnumbered ten to one; and the fate of the village hung in the balance. The enemy were creeping up behind for a final rush, when the katikiro charged down at the head of two hundred yelling Bairo. The stockade was cleared in a few seconds and the baffled enemy driven back over the ditch.

"Whew!" blew Tom, and then for the first time became aware that he had received a slight spear-wound in the right arm. "Blood-brother indeed!" he said with a smile to the katikiro. "But Msala, my friend, you were only just in time. In

a minute or two it would have been another case of what-d'ye-call-him against the world. Why were you so long bringing up reinforcements?"

The katikiro was exceedingly sorry, but just before Mbutu had reached him a similar request had been made by the chief, and he had felt bound, of course, to obey his chief first. But it turned out after all to be a mere waste of time, for the enemy in the north-west quarter, while making an extremely blusterous demonstration, had never come within striking distance, and Msala had soon recognized that their show of activity was a mere feint to draw off attention from the real attack at the other end. Tom saw that the delay had been unavoidable, and could only be thankful that the much-needed support had come after all in the very nick of time.

The brief rest was a boon; but the enemy were not routed, nor even definitively driven off. They were still clinging to their position outside the stockade, and the Bahima could not get at them without exposing themselves, nor even assail them effectively with their spears, for the Arabs had rifles, and were indeed dropping shots over into the village. It was clearly necessary to put a stop to these offensive tactics, and Tom was perplexed as to what measure to adopt. Suddenly the idea occurred to him: could he try a few fireballs? Vague recollections came to him of something he had read about fireballs in defence of towns during the wars in the Netherlands. He had noticed plenty of coarse wool of sheep and goats in the village; there were heaps of shavings where the artificers had been making spear-shafts; and the place was reeking with fat of various kinds. He knew also that there was a large store of the native spirituous liquors, museru and marwa, in a shed near the hut of the chief's cook and purveyor, the muchumbi wanyama, and he thought it would be rather a good than an evil if some of the spirits were consumed externally. He therefore left the katikiro in command while he himself went to consult the chief.

Barega was charmed with the simplicity and ingenuity of the notion of worrying the enemy with fireballs, but somewhat downcast when he learnt the use to which his wine-cellar was to be put. Thereupon Tom, with the tact that had marked all his dealing with the natives, did not insist, but quietly pointed out that if the Arabs got in, they would set fire to the village, and the spirits would be destroyed with all the rest. It was surely better to use half of it in doing some mischief among the enemy, and perhaps by this means decisively turn the scale.

The chief thought over the matter, consulted the kasegara, and finally, with an obvious wrench, gave his consent to the course Kuboko proposed. No more time was lost; twenty natives were immediately set to roll up balls about six inches in diameter, made of wool and shavings and fat, and anything else combustible that came to hand, and finally steeped in the heady spirit. When some hundred balls were ready, Tom had them carried to his old post, where the Arabs were once

more attempting to scale the stockade. They were lighted and thrown in rapid succession over the stockade on to the trellis-bridge. The Arabs at first tried to quench the fallen balls, but others came flaming through the air still more rapidly, and after some score had been thrown, fearing that their retreat over the ditch was likely to be cut off by the burning of their bridge, the enemy threw up the sponge and beat a hasty retreat. As they retired, the Bahima gave a tremendous whoop, and sent a cloud of arrows and spears after them, causing many a gap in their ranks. They fled on in rage and confusion, and vanished behind the plantation.

"Ah! I think they've had enough," said Tom. "Barega, my brother, what do you think of our morning's work?"

Barega confessed himself "pleased too much", as Mbutu interpreted him. "Say one fing, sah; say no want no more museru wasted!"

"Good heavens!" was Tom's thought, "it's all got to be argued again. Wasted! As Mr. Barkworth would say, 'There's no gratitude in these natives!'" But all he said was: "Tell the chief that I hope we shall need no more of his excellent stuff, and that I consider he has shown a fine spirit of self-denial for the common good. The scamp!" he added under his breath; "he ought to be as pleased as Punch!"

Tom was in the highest spirits. He felt confident now that the resources at his command were sufficient to defend the village against all attacks in force, and he hoped that the enemy would appreciate the situation and relinquish their enterprise.

The rest of that day passed uneventfully. At night sentries were posted as usual, and none of the precautions were relaxed; but there was no attack. The day slipped by with the same tranquillity. Parties of the enemy were seen at times, but they were always out of range, and, so far as could be ascertained from the village, were not making any preparations for renewing the assault. That night Tom, walking round by the stockade the last thing before turning in, noticed that at short intervals from the north gate round the western and southern sides to the extreme south-east corner, where the ground shelved down rapidly to the foot of the precipice, large watch-fires were burning, which had not previously been the case.

"What does that mean?" he thought. "Are they going to make a regular siege of it? I hope not, for to be cooped up here for another week would be awful. I'd give something for a newspaper, or Ranjy's cricket book, or even Euclid--yes, by Jove, even old *quod erat demonstrandum*--to help pass the time away. By the by, I'll be forgetting all my maths out here, and if I'm to stick to engineering that'll never do. Well, if it turns out a siege, I'll set myself a few stiff problems and correct the solutions experimentally, eh?--besides teaching these beggars something of infantry drill. Heigh-ho! 'the heathen in his blindness'--who'd have thought I should ever be living among 'em, and a blood-brother too!"

And as he walked back to his hut, in a fit of abstraction he began to whistle the tune of "From Greenland's icy mountains," to the great contentment of the katikiro lying awake.

CHAPTER XIV

The Siege of Barega's

The Arab Camp--A Balista--A Vain Appeal--Eureka--Cutting a Channel--The Eleventh Hour--Barega's Last Fight--After the Battle

Tom's premonitions were well founded; on awaking next morning he saw that the whole accessible part of the village was blockaded by a chain of posts extending from the north gate to the south-east corner. The banana plantations on the south side appeared to be occupied in force, and the object of the enemy was clearly to prevent any going in or coming out, and so to starve the villagers into submission. Naturally Tom congratulated himself on his foresight in stocking the village with food, and expressed to the chief his confident hope that the besiegers would tire.

That their intentions were serious was soon evident. Early in the morning a large gang of Manyema were observed, nearly half a mile up the hill, engaged in damming up the stream, and diverting its course from the village away to the left Tom turned to the katikiro, who happened to be by his side, and smilingly pointed out what the enemy were doing. The katikiro was never loth to laugh, and he fairly bubbled over, slapping his thighs and chuckling with infinite enjoyment.

"How mad they will be," thought Tom, "when they find that we can manage without water! The man who planted this village round a constant spring was a genius. Besides, they must know there's plenty of water in the ditch at present, not very palatable, perhaps, but enough to keep us alive."

He wondered where the enemy had fixed their main camp. Those of them who came within sight were for the most part Manyema, and it occurred to Tom that perhaps the Arabs had departed for a time, to return with reinforcements of their own race. However, on the third night of the siege a Muhima managed to creep out without attracting the attention of the besiegers, and returned after being absent about three hours, with information that relieved Tom's mind on that point. He discovered that the Arabs had formed an entrenched camp in a green hollow at the foot of the precipice at the north-east corner of the village.

They had evidently noticed that by moving in close to the base of the cliffs they were protected by the overhanging spur from the weapons of the Bahima, as well as from any other missiles, such as rocks or fireballs, that might be hurled from above. They had placed their camp so that any projectiles thus cast at them would fall outside their eastern boundary, and their rampart and trench were sufficiently formidable to secure them against assault. The position had the further advantage that the cliff protected them from the prevailing wind, while they had a good supply of water from a stream that joined the village stream a few hundred yards below the precipice. Some little distance to the south, where the ground rose steeply, a large body of their slave carriers had been penned like cattle, under a strong guard. The Muhima said that the chief camp contained some fifteen hundred Arabs, a number which Tom thought might safely be divided by three.

Several days passed away, most wearisomely for the two thousand people shut up within the stockade. While in time of peace, with men constantly away on hunting expeditions and women working in the fields, the village was never offensively over-populated, yet now that all the people were necessarily at home, with more than the usual number of cattle, Tom feared that it would before long be a hot-bed of fever. The people, he had found, were always accustomed to allow calves and other young animals to sleep in their own huts along with their families, but it was quite unusual, even for them, to be cooped up constantly with full-grown beasts. He did what he could to make the conditions as little unfavourable to health as possible; but not much was in his power, and he fretted at his impotence.

The besiegers had clearly abandoned all ideas of an assault in force, but every now and then a bullet or a slug would whistle over the stockade, and more than one man was killed. Tom got the chief at length to forbid any of the people to show themselves, and, accustomed as they were to a free and open life, they were greatly irritated by the restriction. Seeing that something must be done to keep them in good-humour, Tom took advantage of their love of novelty and their amazing fondness for drill to instruct them for an hour or two every day in simple movements and formations, finding that they were quite content to continue drilling on their own account for hours at a stretch.

As time went on, the besiegers were amazed at the unconcern with which the stoppage of the water-supply had been received in the village, and came to the conclusion that the people must have been drawing on the stagnant and dirty water in the ditch. One morning, then, Tom, who never relaxed his vigilance, saw a body of men approaching under cover of a light palisade lined with skins of Hima oxen, which effectually protected them from the spears and arrows of the villagers. He was not long left in doubt about the object they had in view. They came right up to the ditch, and began to cut a channel where the ground sloped

down to the east, so as to drain off the water.

Tom was in no anxiety about the loss of water, but he objected to being "done", as he put it to himself, and yet, in default of firearms, saw no means of preventing the enemy from effecting their purpose. Fortunately a tremendous downpour of rain, forerunner of the approaching rainy season, drove the Arabs away for that time, and Tom at once set his wits to work to defeat their scheme should they return. Thinking of one thing after another, all at once he remembered, in an old illustrated edition of Caesar he had used in a lower form at school, some engravings of the torments used by the Romans in their siege operations. There was the catapult--ah! and the balista; that was the very thing. Could he manage to rig up a balista before the ditch was effectually drained? It was worth trying.

"Good heavens! what it is to be without pencil and paper!" he groaned. But he managed with a spear-head to scratch on a stone a rough diagram of the machine, as nearly as he remembered it, and then immediately set to work to construct a model.

There was plenty of wood in the village, and it took very little time to hammer together the square framework, and to chisel out the grooved beam on which the missile was to run. While this was being done he set some of the Bairo to twist two many-stranded ropes, and the native smiths to forge an iron handle for his winch. When this was fixed in its place at the bottom of the grooved plank, and the ropes securely fastened at each side of the frame, he placed one of the fireballs in front of the cross rope on the plank, sloped this downwards at an angle of forty-five degrees, and drew the rope back by means of the winch until it was stretched to its utmost tension and almost as tight as a steel spring. Then he released his hold of the handle, it flew round, the spring was suddenly relaxed, and the ball shot along the groove and over the stockade, falling some ten yards beyond.

"I'll have a welcome ready for the Arabs if they return," he thought, delighted at the success of his experiment.

Some three hours after the downpour had ceased, the Arabs came back in stronger force, again bearing their palisades. Tom allowed them to arrive within five yards of the trench, and then let fly a piece of rock from his balista. A tremendous cheer arose from the crowd of wondering negroes as the missile sped with sure aim to the very middle of the palisade, with such force that it tore a hole through skin and wicker-work, and struck a man behind.

The Arabs were startled, as they might well be, and halted. Before they had made up their minds what to do, another missile struck the palisade, and ricochetted across it, inflicting a blow on one of the Arabs that would have killed him if its force had not been partly broken. Another stone, and another, and then

the enemy hesitated no longer; they dropped their palisade, flung down their tools, and bolted for their lives. Mocking jeers and exultant laughter followed them, and then a shower of arrows, and four or five of them dropped. Tom ordered his men to cease shooting, and allowed the wounded to be carried off by their friends.

That was the last attempt the enemy made to take the offensive. They had clearly recognized by this time that they had a more formidable antagonist to deal with than the average native of Central Africa. Tom, indeed, had freely exposed himself to their marksmen throughout the operations, and had had more than one narrow escape, as well as the one slight wound in the arm, which gave him no concern. They could scarcely have failed to perceive that they had to reckon with a European of determination and resource, and from that time on they contented themselves with a strict investment. They rounded-up what cattle they could lay their hands on, and, having the banana and other plantations of the villagers to draw upon, they lived luxuriously without consuming the provisions they had themselves brought. They could thus afford to play a waiting game.

Within the village, however, things were becoming unpleasant, nay, dangerous. The sanitary arrangements, at any time crude and imperfect, were unequal to the necessities of the case, and one or two cases of sickness had already occurred. The strain upon the fortitude of the people was proving more than it could bear. After three weeks the food-supply began to run short, and the daily rations were diminished, amid murmurings from the Bairo. A week later it was found necessary by the chief to order the slaughter of several of the much-prized cattle. Now that it had come to this pass, the Bairo were bound to suffer most, for, living as they did for the most part on fruits and grain, the stock of which was well-nigh exhausted, they were without the resources of the Bahima, and were earlier in straits for food.

Early in the fifth week of the siege Tom begged the chief to call a palaver. Barega had displayed qualities of patience and endurance which won Tom's unbounded admiration. From the beginning of the siege he seemed to have recognized that his only chance of successful resistance was to trust in the ingenuity and prudence of his blood-brother, and he had sunk his own pre-eminence without a shade of jealousy. No doubt this was in great measure due to Tom's own tactfulness. He took no steps without consulting the chief, and he had that invaluable faculty which enables a man to get his own way without the other party suspecting it. Barega, therefore, willingly called a council, and showed his readiness to listen to anything his brother had to say.

"Barega and my brothers," Tom began, "we have held out so long, and we are not going to give in." (Grunts of applause.) "But we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that we are in sore straits. Our food will last but a few days more,

and then, without help, we must starve. Now, if our enemies had no firearms, Barega and I together would lead you out of the village and attack them. But we cannot cope with their weapons, and if we made the attempt it would surely fail. Is it impossible to obtain help from outside? Are there no villages within reach whose people have suffered at the hands of the Arabs, and would aid us against the common enemy? Brothers, it is for you to speak."

The katikiro at once replied that there were three villages within a radius of thirty miles which certainly had suffered by the Arabs' depredations and might possibly be able to lend assistance. One of them, however, Barega reminded the assembly, was ruled by a chief who was extremely jealous of his power, and would not be much inclined to put himself out on any such matter. Still, it could be tried. Barega then selected three of his fleetest runners, and two hours before dawn, under a moonless sky, they were sent out singly from the north gate.

When morning broke, Tom was called from his hut by furious cries in the village. Hastening out, he soon understood the cause of the uproar. Outside the stockade, just beyond arrow-range, a big Manyema was parading before the eyes of the villagers, holding a spear aloft, and on the end of it was the bleeding head of one of the three runners. Behind him marched a crowd of mocking negroes, pointing derisively to the impaled head, and shouting threats at the enraged villagers. Tom mentally registered that as one more atrocity for which the Arabs would some day have to pay, and then did his best to pacify the people.

The other two runners, as it turned out, had been lucky enough to get through the enemy's lines undetected. They both returned on the following night. One of them announced that Barega's rival had received him with scorn and insult, and that he had barely escaped with his life. The other brought news that a raiding-party of Arabs, evidently despatched by the surrounding force, had surprised and burned the neighbouring village a few days before, and that the few inhabitants who had escaped were hiding in the forest.

With this intelligence, it was impossible to disguise the fact that the outlook was gloomy in the extreme. It was hopeless to look for help from outside, and from the inside it appeared that nothing could be done. The rainy season had set in, and sickness had declared itself unmistakeably, especially among the Bairo, who had all along been less well nourished than the Bahima. They were reduced now to a few handfuls of grain daily, and as they roamed about, the ribs showing through their skin, they cast ravenous eyes at the few remaining cattle. Murmurs of "Give us food! give us food!" met the ears of Barega and his officers as they went about, and some of the more violent of the poor people had begun again to listen to the half-lunatic ravings of the medicine-man, who, since his defeat, had sulked almost unnoticed in his hut. Even some of the Bahima, talking among themselves, said that it would be better to submit to the enemy than to die of slow starvation. The

katikiro, who through all the incidents of the siege had never lost his faith in Tom, informed him of these murmurs, and Tom impressed on Barega that he must still them at once. The chief immediately summoned a mass-meeting, and addressed his people in an impassioned speech. What would their fate be, he asked, if they yielded? Nine-tenths of the men would be butchered on the spot, along with all the older women and all who were too infirm to stand the strain of marching in a slave-caravan. What would become of their younger women and children? Barega pictured the line of miserable slaves, marching in chains at the mercy of their brutal captors, dropping and left to rot on the path; if they survived the march, to suffer tortures compared with which the fate of their murdered kinsfolk would be happy indeed. Let them choose, he cried, let them choose freely; as for him, he would die in his village, fighting his foe if so it might be; if not, still he would die a free man!

His burning words provoked a shout of approval from the throng, and then Tom stepped forward. A deep hush fell upon the assembly; every man there felt a strange magnetic power in the young white man who had stood by them and done them such good service.

"O Bahima and Bairo!" he cried, "brothers, all of you, do not give up hope. You have heard your brave chief; his words are the words of a lion-heart. I tell you now that I believe we shall yet win. There is a town, in a far land belonging to the Great White King, which was besieged like this village for many long days, and where the people waited and waited, hoping that at last their friends would come to their aid and drive away the hordes besieging them. Their food was gone; they were sick, aye, sick unto death; but did they give in? Know that the children of the Great White King never give in! No; they waited and fought, and some of them died, and then at last, far over the fields, they saw the spears of their friends advancing to help them, and the enemy melted away like mist in the sun, and they were saved! Let us wait also, a little longer, my brothers!"

For a moment after he had ceased the silence was unbroken. Then the katikiro sprang into the ring; his feelings could be played on like the notes of an instrument; raising his spear aloft he cried "Muzungu will save us! Kuboko will save us!" The crowd took up his cry, and Tom was touched to the quick to see their haggard faces lit up once more with the light of hope, and their wild eyes fixed on him as their expected deliverer.

That night he lay awake, thinking, thinking, racking his brains for some means of compelling the enemy to raise the siege and justifying the confidence of the villagers. All the expedients that he had ever read of were passed in turn before his mind, only to be dismissed as impracticable; the want of firearms and gunpowder was against them all. Then suddenly, by an inspiration seemingly quite unconnected with his train of thought, a light flashed upon his mind. There

was no need to weigh probabilities; the idea carried conviction with it. Crying "I have it!" he sprang from his couch, waking Mbutu with a start.

"Come, Mbutu," he said, "a night's work and a day's waiting and then we shall be free. Come with me."

In pitch darkness, for the sky was heavy with threatening rain, they made their way across the courtyard into the village, past the silent reservoir and the swollen stream, up to the stockade above the precipice. There they clambered over with infinite caution, lest the slightest sound should arouse the attention of the Arabs below. Feeling over the ground, they searched for the small aperture through which Tom had thrust his stick when exploring the cavern. Tom was half afraid lest some shifting of the soil had covered it up; but after ten minutes' careful search Mbutu whispered that he had put his hand into it. Thrusting a stick into the hole to mark the spot, they hurried to the chief's hut. When Barega came out, rubbing his eyes, Tom asked him for the services of twenty men, with baskets, spades, and bars of iron. He asked him also to pretend to lead a sortie out of the south gate, and to order his men to make as much noise as possible.

"Beat all your drums," he said; "clash all your pots and pans together; let the men yell their hardest, and keep up the din until I send you word."

Barega naturally asked what purpose was to be served by all this to-do, and what his brother would be about in the meantime. But Tom begged him to wait a little; he had a plan, he said. He would rather keep it to himself until he was sure of its success, lest his brother should be disappointed. The chief agreed to follow his instructions, and Tom left him.

Getting twenty of the strongest men together, he led them across the stockade, impressing on them that they must exercise the greatest caution and hold their tongues. Arriving the hole, he selected four of the longest and strongest bars of iron and ordered the men to push them quietly for some distance into the narrow cleft. Then, when he gave the word, one man on the one side was to push and two men on the other to pull at each bar, his aim being to widen the cleft into a practicable passage. The bars had barely been inserted when the noise of drums rolled over the stockade. A moment afterwards a great clashing and clanking startled the air, and wild cries from some hundreds of lusty throats woke echoes from rock and plantation. The sounds of hurried movement rose from the depths of the precipice; the Arab camp was evidently alarmed; and then Tom gave the signal. The men pushed and pulled as he had directed, but in vain; the heavy rock refused to budge. Another man was told off to each bar, and again they put forth their strength; but still there was no sign of movement. The uproar from the village was greater than ever; there was little risk, after all, Tom thought, of his movements being heard; so he now ordered the men to exert all the force of which they were capable, regardless of noise. The result was startling. The whole

of the ground; near the rock suddenly gave way and fell with a swish and thud into the cavern. Two of the men stumbled forward after it into the darkness, and knocked their shins violently against the rock. But they clambered up again, and Tom found that all the damage they had suffered was a few contusions.

[image]

BAREGA'S VILLAGE DURING THE SIEGE

Tom now went, cautiously feeling his way, to the extreme verge of the precipice, and, bidding his men keep silence, strained his ears to catch any sounds from below. There was not a murmur. He judged that the Arabs had hastily left their camp and made their way up to the south gate to meet the anticipated attack. It appeared safe.

"Dig, men, dig!" he said.

The twenty Bahima began to dig a passage through the debris. Not a word was spoken. The din in the village was beginning to lull. Tom despatched Mbutu with the request that the noise should be kept up. The baskets of earth, as they were filled, were carried to the stockade and emptied on the inside. The work went on as rapidly as possible in the darkness, the men toiling with unabated zeal, sure that Kuboko, the man of big medicine, must have some excellent plan in view. Meanwhile the chief, finding the Arabs pressing close, and their rifle fire, erratic as it was, becoming dangerous, had withdrawn his sortie-party into the village; but the drums still maintained a tremendous din that must have been heard in the still night air for many miles.

Rather more than two hours had gone, and only the first part of the task Tom had in his mind was completed. A clear passage ten feet wide had been cut from the summit of the cliff into the cavern. Ordering the panting negroes to sit down and rest, Tom walked back the twelve feet to the stockade, took a string of bush-rope from his pocket, and tying it to one of the palings, returned to his men. The straight line made by the string lay in the direction of the tank. Then he set the men to dig a trench along the line towards the stockade, making it ten feet wide and three deep. He ordered them to stop within a foot of the fencing, lest that should be loosened by the movement of the earth. This took another two hours, as nearly as Tom could judge. It was approaching three o'clock in the morning, and there was still much to be done before his arrangements were complete. Thinking it wise to defer the rest of his operations, for which light was absolutely necessary, he dismissed the men, returned to the village, and sent word to the chief that the weary drummers might now take their well-earned rest.

Then he unfolded his scheme to the wondering chief. The Arab camp at the foot of the precipice was, it was true, secure from missiles hurled over the spur; but it was immediately below the cavern. Tom's plan was to let the water from the full reservoir suddenly into the cavern, and he calculated that the force it gained as it plunged thence over the precipice would be sufficient to work havoc below. The reservoir was eighty yards long and sixty wide; its depth was more than six feet; the weight of the water it contained was thus some seven thousand tons. By the time this immense quantity, gathering impetus as it fell, reached the camp two hundred feet beneath its outlet, the dynamic energy it would have acquired would be tremendous. The plan threw Barega into wild excitement, and he was eager to see it carried out at once; but Tom smilingly informed him that there was work still to be done, and, thanking him for so admirably making a noise, advised him to retire to his hut and finish his broken sleep.

Next day the whole village knew that Kuboko had some terrifically big medicine in preparation, though none but the chief as yet knew what it was. Tom had many times to drive away the crowd of little half-starved children who came about him, looking up into his face with admiration and awe. There was still a trench to be dug from the reservoir to the stockade, but as the village was exposed to the Arabs on the upper ground to the south, no digging could be done during the day. Rain fell heavily, and Tom hoped almost against hope that it would cease before night, and that some glimmer of moonlight would enable him then to complete his preparations. During the day, however, he was not idle. He employed the same men who had so intelligently constructed his balista in making the rough semblance of the two doors of a river lock, each five feet wide and six feet deep. When finished, the edge of each was pierced with a red-hot bar of iron in three places at equal distances apart. Then the two doors were stitched together with bush rope through the holes, and the seam was covered with cloth well plastered with kaolin, the cloth being made to adhere to the wood with glue extracted from the bones of oxen. Wood was getting short in the village, but Tom, after some search, found four stout balks which he laid aside for future use.

Well pleased with his morning's work, he slept all the afternoon, and then, as soon as it was dark, set eight hundred men and women digging the trench to connect the tank with the trench outside the stockade. He placed them at various points along the line of twenty yards, so that the work might be quickly carried out, and nearest the tank left a bank three feet thick untouched. When the trench was so far complete, he let down at the end three feet from the tank the twin hatchway he had constructed, so that it completely blocked the channel, and shored it up with the four balks of timber, two to each panel. Round the lower end of these he got his men to fasten strong ropes, the other ends of which he tied to posts driven into the ground above.

It was now, he judged, about eleven o'clock. The rain had ceased, and in three hours the new moon would rise. Dismissing the great body of the workers, with orders that a small gang of them should remain within call, he took the chief aside to make final arrangements. As the edge of the moon appeared over the horizon, Barega was to muster four hundred men at the south gate, and the katikiro two hundred at the north gate. Tom surmised that when the avalanche of water descended upon their camp, the Arabs would in their flight rush for safety to the higher ground on either side. They would probably be unarmed, and should fall an easy prey to the Bahima. Those who were encamped round the village and in the banana plantation would naturally run to the assistance of their friends, and would take the paths around the south end of the village. Three hundred of the four hundred Bahima there placed would take them in flank, the remaining hundred were to attack the fugitives from the camp, who would be assailed at the same time by the party from the north. Thinking out all these details carefully, Tom saw the possibility of a hitch should the Arabs become alarmed before he was ready; but he impressed upon Barega and the katikiro that they must entirely reverse the procedure of the previous night, and, instead of making as much din as possible, enjoin the strictest silence on their men.

It only remained to scoop out the earth left between the tank and the trench, and between the end of the outer trench and the stockade. Some ten feet of the fencing was quietly removed to facilitate operations; then the reserve gang was called up, and in about an hour the work was done. The scooping at the tank end was a delicate task, for Tom did not wish to lose any lives by drowning. The last thin wall of earth between the boards and the reservoir was pushed down with long poles, and the water, flowing into the trench, was checked by the hatchway. Beyond that there was a clear course through a channel five feet wide and six deep to the arch of the cavern, and that was perpendicularly above the camp. Tom sent Mbutu to see that the sortie-parties were ready, loosed the ends of the ropes about the posts, and placed four strong men at each. His arrangements were complete.

Now that the critical moment was so near at hand Tom's heart in spite of himself beat with almost audible thuds. There was the huge reservoir, the surface of the water just discernible, only a gentle ripple on its surface indicating its recent disturbance. In a few short moments that placid pond was to become an impetuous torrent, rushing downward with all the force of its seven thousand tons, nothing to check it, nothing to prevent it from dealing death to the men below. As his vivid imagination conjured up the scene at the base of the precipice, and contrasted it with the peaceful scene above, Tom felt a pang, a touch of pity and remorse, a shuddering reluctance to launch so many miserable wretches into eternity. But that inward vision dissolved, and another took its place. He saw once more the long caravan of slaves, the gaunt, chained figures, with the wild,

hunted look, the terrible lash of their masters provoking shrieks answered by redoubled blows, the horrible mutilations inflicted on weak women and children. There rang in his ears once more the piteous cry of a poor slave woman who for some trivial offence was led away to be slaughtered: "Oh, my lord, oh, my master! Oh, my lord, oh, my master!" He felt a rush of hot blood to his face, a flush of shame that such things should be. He remembered that such treatment would be measured out to Barega's people if the Arabs captured the village, and thought with a solemn sense of awe of the strange chain of events which had made him so potent a factor in the life and safety of these black people. It was life against life--the Arabs were a pest--and he set his lips and hardened his heart.

Then, looking towards the horizon, he saw the ruddy horn of the moon emerging. Ten minutes passed; he could see dimly the outlines of the trees.

"Now!" he whispered, with an outward calm that gave no clue to his intense emotion. The sixteen men heaved at the ropes; the balks of timber fell; the weight of water falling on the unsupported hatchway drove it inwards; and in ten seconds more the torrent swept with a dull roar into the cavern. Then, with a crash that seemed to shake the cliff to its foundations, the enormous mass of loose rock hiding the mouth of the cavern was driven over the edge. Even above the roar and splash rose the cries of the hapless men beneath, and then from each end of the camp came, as though in mocking answer, the exultant shouts of the warriors hastening to assail their foe. A few rifle shots rang out, but the rush of the Bahima was irresistible. They were famished, they were fighting for their lives and liberty, and, dashing down the slopes to north and south, they fell without mercy or respite upon their shaken foes.

Demoralized, leaderless, unarmed, the Arabs and Manyema below were rushing hither and thither like scared sheep, unable to act, unable to think. The force in the plantations above, catching the panic, scattered at the first onslaught of the Bahima, who, with spears and knives and every kind of weapon, were strewing the ground with dead. One little group, holding close together under their leader, came rushing across the path of the Bahima chief at the head of his men. Barega lifted his spear to strike, but the Arab leader, at four paces' distance, fired his pistol at him point-blank, and he fell. The next instant the Arab was transfixed with a dozen spears, but the gallant chief, shot through the breast, had fought his last fight. His men rushed on, pursuing the enemy with savage cries, and the chief, lifting himself painfully upon his elbow, saw that he was alone. A few seconds later, Tom, his task on the bluff finished, came hasting with Mbutu and his sixteen men to assist in the fight. Many bodies lay scattered prone on the ground, but among them he saw one man in a half-sitting posture.

"Kuboko! Kuboko, my brother!"

Tom heard the faint cry, started, and turned aside. He had but just time

to grip the outstretched hand; then Barega heaved a sigh and died. Tom stood looking down at his dead friend, for, during the months they had been so strangely thrown together, he had come to look upon the simple, heathen African as a true friend. Thoughts of what he owed to the negro passed through his mind; he felt deeply sorry that Barega was never to enjoy the fruits of the victory for which they had worked together. "Poor fellow!" he murmured; then, gulping down the lump in his throat, he went on.

The tide of battle, if battle it could be called, had meanwhile rolled onwards. All unconscious of the death of their chief, the Bahima sped down into the plain, hunting the fugitives like wild beasts, tracking them in the moonlight like sleuth-hounds to places where they attempted to hide. There were no prisoners, none merely wounded; the Bahima did their fell work thoroughly. Right into the outskirts of the forest they kept up the chase till, tired of the work of slaughter, they began to straggle back to the village. All night long they continued to come in by twos and threes, some small parties even not arriving until after dawn.

The scene when daylight broke was gruesome beyond belief. The tent of the Arab chief lay half-buried beneath a mass of broken rock in the centre of a shallow pond. Many of the Arabs and Manyeina had perished by the avalanche of earth and water, and scores had fallen to the spears of the Bahima. The camp was half under water, and all kinds of articles were floating about or showing above the surface, among them several barrels which Tom guessed to be filled with gunpowder. Rifles, pistols, spears, a medley of weapons and implements, were scattered all around, and outside the immediate circle of devastation many boxes and bags of provisions lay uninjured.

Walking down to the scene, sick at heart, and yet convinced that he had only done his duty, Tom came, within about five hundred yards of the chief's tent, upon an enclosure in which some four hundred slaves were herded. It seemed that only by the merest chance could they have escaped the massacre. They had in reality been saved by their position. Their enclosure had been placed where it was so that the free movements of their masters round the village should not be impeded. Thus, while exposed to the wind and weather, they had been out of the direct line of the Bahima's onslaught. Being chained and fenced in, they had been unable to escape, and, indeed, their Manyema guards had stuck to their posts till the last, and only fled when dawn showed them the fate of their friends. Tom at once gave orders that the fetters on these men and women should be knocked off, and that they should be taken under a guard into the village. They could there be fed, and it might be decided subsequently what was to be done with them.

Tom then set a party of Bairo to recover from the water as many of the Arabs' effects as possible, and another to search the surrounding country for any traces of Hima cattle which had escaped the Arabs. He was about to order another

gang to bury the dead, but remembered that the people who had died in the village before the arrival of the Arabs had not been buried, but taken out into the open to be eaten by the beasts of the field. Only the chief's body was usually buried, and all that was left of Barega had already been carried into the village to await solemn interment in the ground below his hut. Ordering the villagers to remove the dead to a distance, and to leave them exposed on the plain, Tom returned dead-beat to his hut, and threw himself down upon his couch.

CHAPTER XV

Arms and the Man

A Deputation--An Unexpected Honour--Msala Improves the Occasion--The Political Situation--First Steps--A Problem--Prospecting for Sulphur--Herr Schwab on His Travels--Made in Germany

The chief was buried at nightfall. A long framework of banana-stalks was constructed, on which his body was placed. It was then covered with several layers of bark-cloth provided by his wives, who had smeared their faces with kaolin, and taken off their necklaces, armlets, and other articles of adornment, exhibiting, besides these outward signs of mourning, a very real grief. Tom had a vague idea that at a chief's death his wives were slain and buried with him, and was greatly relieved to find that this was not the custom among the Bahima. A deep hole was dug beneath the hut, and there, after the recital of a sort of liturgy by the medicine-man, who had emerged from his retirement into a position of some importance again, Barega was consigned to his last home amid wailing and lamentation.

Returning sadly to his hut, Tom lay awake thinking of many things. His task, he supposed, was now done. The villagers would elect another chief, and things would go on as before. He himself would be free to return to his own kind and kin, whose interests he resolved to enlist on behalf of the people.

"And surely the Free State officials ought to look after them," he thought. "I suppose they are too remote to have done anything hitherto. I wonder whether Uncle Jack could get me some work under their government, so that I could do something systematically towards the freeing of the slaves? Englishmen have been thus employed, I know. There was Captain Hinde, and Captain Burrows; I am sure I have read something about their work. I'd rather be in the service of our own Government, of course, but I suppose there's no chance of that whatever.

Well, it isn't much use speculating after all. I don't want to go back to Glasgow if I can help it, though, if I am to be an engineer, I suppose I couldn't learn my trade better anywhere else. I wonder who their new chief will be, by the by? Murasi is, of course, out of the question, and Mwonga, the other brother, is at present too young, though he's a fine, handsome, intelligent lad, and will turn out well some day. The katikiro--really I am quite fond of that amusing old boy--is all very well in a fight, but he hasn't a particle of moral courage, and I'm afraid, if it came to a tussle between him and the medicine-man, he'd be nowhere. Well, they must fight it out among themselves."

Next morning, before he was up, Mbutu came to him in a state of considerable excitement.

"Sah," he said, "katikiro outside; kasegara outside; all big men outside; want see sah, bad want."

"Do they, indeed? Well, Mbutu, tell them I'll be out in a minute or two. I suppose they'll proceed to elect a new chief to-day," he resumed, when Mbutu returned.

"No, sah, no chief yet; wait one moon; great big cry fust."

"Dear me! I shouldn't have thought there'd be official mourning in savage Africa! So they keep it up for a month, eh?"

"Yes, sah. Brudders, sons, cousins, all people come drink museru, sah; knock big drum, little drum; sing, dance all night, sah; den make new chief."

"I should like to see that; but we can't wait a month; we must be off back to the Nyanza in a day or two."

All this time Tom had been taking his morning tub and donning his clothes.

"Don't believe Uncle Jack would know me from a chimpanzee," he said with a laugh. "What with this wretched down upon my cheeks, and my long mane, and my patched old toggery, I'm more like one of those begging fakirs in India he has told me about than anything else I ever heard of. Well, now to see what my friend Msala wants."

He went out of the hut. The katikiro, the kasegara, and all the other leading men of the village were grouped with Mwonga, the chief's younger brother, in their midst, shifting from one foot to the other in a sort of nervous excitement. The instant they saw Tom they threw themselves flat on their faces in a line, and began to crawl towards him.

"What on earth's the meaning of this?" ejaculated Tom, aghast. "And what are you grinning at?" he added, turning to Mbutu, whose face was beaming with delight.

"Neyanzi-gé! Neyanzi-gé!" cried Mbutu, clapping his hands. "I praise too much, sah. I fank too much."

"For goodness sake tell them to get up and behave as reasonable creatures.

That's the sort of thing they do to their fetishes; I'm not a fetish. 'Pon my word, it's too silly even to laugh at. Up, Msala; don't grovel there. Confound you, leave my knees alone," he added, under his breath, for the katikiro had crawled up to him and clasped his knees.

Mbutu made the crawlers understand that Kuboko would be seriously annoyed if they did not stand on their feet, and they got up, one by one, with manifest reluctance.

"Now," said Tom, "just explain in a sensible way what all this performance means."

The katikiro looked at his companions as though asking their permission to speak; then, leading Mwonga by the hand, he stepped forward.

"O Kuboko," he said, "Barega is dead, a chief brave as a lion, mighty in war, a great hunter, a fearless slayer of elephants. Now we, his people, have no chief; we have lost our father and mother; we have none to lead us in fight or guide us in peace, none to judge us or to do us right. Murasi is unstable as water; he is at this moment mingling his tears with museru. Mwonga here is but a boy; brave--let no man say he is not brave,--but many moons must pass before he can slay elephants and rule men like his brother Barega. Know, O Kuboko, that by the custom of the Bahima we should wait a long moon before we choose our chief; the days of mourning are not yet over; the fresh museru is not brewed. But we dare not wait. The Arabs are gone, those that were left of them; thou, O Kuboko, knowest why and how they went; but they will come again; they will bring their friends in number as the seed of millet, and will fight against us, and what can we do against them without a chief? Why will they come? They will come because they must. If they submit like dogs to a whipping, will they not be dogs for evermore? What black man will fear them? They will be mocked at, flouted, kicked and spurned; the black man will hunt them. They must come back to prove that they are lions and no dogs. And when they come, what are we, O Kuboko? We have no fire-sticks; we have no strong magic; our medicine-man is but hollow, a tinkler like his own bell. What are we without thee, O Kuboko? Who was it dug the ditch around our village? Who was it made the fireballs? Who built the wonderful thrower that flung stones a thousand miles? Who made the water run like a water-spout from the sky, and saved us and ours from death and chains? Thou it was, O Kuboko; thou didst these things, and more. Barega, yes, Barega was a great chief, and thou, O Kuboko, thou didst save even Barega. Thou art mightier than Barega and ten thousand other chiefs; thou alone canst defend us against the mighty host soon to come upon us; thou hast the magic of the white men, the strong arm of all the children of the Great White King. Thou, O Kuboko, art our chief. We all say it. We have talked; we have spoken to the spirits of our fathers and our fathers' fathers, and they all say Kuboko is our chief."

"It's very kind of you, Msala, and you've said uncommonly nice things about me, but it can't be, my friend. I am really deeply touched by your confidence, but I feel that I ought to lose no time now in rejoining my own people. You are mourning your dead chief, and my friends, you must remember, are mourning me, no doubt, as dead."

Kuboko need not think of that, said the katikiro eagerly; messengers should be despatched at once to the ends of the earth to explain. If he would not be their chief, would he not at least stay with them for a short time? Surely he would not desert them in their need--before he had taught them the way to fight the Arabs.

"Do you really think the Arabs will come back?"

Yes, there was no doubt of it; and in their fastnesses, far beyond the forest, they numbered thousands upon thousands of men. The Bahima were grateful for what Kuboko had already done for them, but what good was it all if they were left to be the prey of a still more numerous host, thirsting for revenge?

Tom mused. It was a case for serious thought. Could he leave them to face the Arabs without his help? It seemed a breach of faith, a desertion. For he felt in his heart that they were right, that the Arabs would certainly return to exact a terrible vengeance, and that without the stimulus of his leadership the Bahima would infallibly be crushed. Tom was the last person to overestimate his value, but he saw clearly that although there was plenty of courage among the Bahima, and a great fund of the qualities that make for self-sacrifice, there was little military aptitude of the higher sort. They would have little or no chance against such practised campaigners as the Arabs and their allies. Yet who was he to match himself against the Arabs? He had had little military training; he was intended for a civilian career; would it not be presumptuous in him to suppose that, if the Arabs returned in their might, he could, with such rough material as he had alone at his disposal, attempt to cope with them? Then he remembered that for generations past he had soldiers among his ancestors; was it some hereditary bent that accounted for his success in the village hitherto? He had been successful. Why should he not be successful again? Why should he not use the powers he had in a service with which his countrymen had so long been identified? In any case--and this clinched his resolve--the Bahima with him would more nearly match the Arabs than without him. Was it not then his duty to remain?

He stood for some moments longer looking across the village at the distant horizon, tapping his foot on the ground, wondering, thinking. The silent negroes watched him anxiously; Mbutu's eager eyes were riveted to his master's face.

"Msala," he said at length, "I will stay. Wait," he added, hushing them with his hand as they began to shout in the fulness of their delight, "I will stay on two conditions. The first is: That I simply hold office in the name of Mwonga here, who will be your chief when I am gone." ("Ntugamba! We say it," cried the men.)

"The second is: That when I consider your village safe from attack I must be free to give up my power, and return to my own people." ("Ntugamba! ntugamba!") "On those conditions I will stay with you, and, with God's help, we will strike such a blow at your enemies as shall destroy their power once and for ever."

The gravity of Tom's tone impressed the Bahima; even the voluble katikiro's voice was silenced. Tom went on:

"In Mwonga's name, then, I ask you to retain your offices. Mwonga, my friend, I will be your brother as I was Barega's, and I will do my best to uphold your dignity as chief. But I must have a free hand. I am older than you; I have seen more than you. You know what I have been able to do for your people, and you must make them understand that all that I do is done in your name, and for their good. Is it well?"

"It is well," cried the negroes.

"Then you will see, Msala, that things are done in due form. You know all about that; I leave it with you."

The shouts of the officials had drawn a great crowd of villagers around, who stood at a respectful distance, looking with intense curiosity and interest at the scene. When the interview had closed with the usual ceremonial grunts, the katikiro, swelling with a new importance, turned and made an oration to the crowd. Hearing that Kuboko was to remain as regent, they skipped and pranced about like mad things, striking up a chorus, "Okubokokuru omwami! Okubokokuru omwami!" (Strong i' th' arm is chief), which they repeated, men, women, and children, a thousand times over, with an enthusiasm at which Tom could not help being touched.

That was a field-day for the katikiro! He went about his work with a zest that showed how thoroughly he enjoyed himself. Funeral rites and the inauguration of a new chief on the same day made a novel experience for him, and he meant to drink the fullest possible delight. The funeral proceedings were despatched first. The whole population assembled in a triple ring, and large pots of museru were passed round. All the drums in the village were carried into the centre and grouped about the great king-drum--a huge thing of tapering wood, nearly as high as a man, decorated with fetish-grass and intricate designs, the drum-head secured by stout thongs of ox-hide. A dancing party of warriors, with shields, spears, and full war-paint, marched into the ring, and, the katikiro giving the word, the chief drummer banged his drum and began a solo:

"Ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah!
Kanwete nga imamba bweyaweta"
(Let me plunge like a lung-fish when it plunges)
"Ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah!"

At the same time the warriors began a slow dance, going round in a circle, and then the lugubrious strain was taken up and repeated in chorus by the whole assembly:

"Ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah!
Kanwete nga imamba bweyaweta
Ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah!"

All the drums joined in the fray, the dance quickened, the warriors sprang up several feet in the air, and all the time the pots of museru went round. Tom was sorry to see that his leading officials were becoming intoxicated, and perceived that one of his tasks would be to inculcate habits of sobriety; at present he felt that he could hardly interfere with a good grace. After this had gone on for some time, the katikiro, more sober than the rest of the magnates, put a stop to the funeral dance, and announced the ceremonial election of a chief. No time was lost in this, the programme being cut and dried. Mwonga was hailed by acclamation, and took his place on a mat of bark-cloth, where he received the obeisance of all the principal men in turn. Tom thought it well to set a good example, and greeted the chief with specially-marked respect. Then he had to take his place beside Mwonga, and as the people came up in a long line the katikiro introduced him: "This is your brother; this is your friend; this is Okubokokuru; this is the man of big medicine," and so on, reciting a tremendous list of the new regent's virtues.

When he had ended, rather for want of breath than lack of matter, the whole company sat down to smoke the ceremonial pipe. A long banana-stalk, with large ivory bowl filled with native tobacco, was handed to the new chief. Tom wondered if every individual was to smoke the pipe through, in which case the ceremony would have lasted a month. But he soon saw that that would have been too laborious and painful an operation. Mwonga lit the tobacco at a glowing brazier, took a few puffs, and passed it to Tom, who, after copying him, handed it to the katikiro. Tom found it hard to retain his gravity as he watched the spectacle. Every man was evidently on his mettle; when his turn came he expanded his lungs with surprising vigour to their greatest extent, and filled mouth, nose, and eyes with the powerful fumes till he coughed violently and the tears ran down his cheeks. His neighbour eagerly held out both hands to receive the pipe, anxious to lose none of his share, and followed the example. The solemn look on their impassive faces, as though they were performing some awful and mysterious rite, quite overcame Tom, who joined in the chorus of coughing in order to smother his laughter. When the smoking was finished, torches were lit, a new dance was begun; flutes piped, lyres jangled, drums were thumped, and the revelry was kept up far into the night.

Everyone wore a more or less dejected look next morning, and Tom took the opportunity to walk about the neighbourhood, attended by Mbutu, for the sake of having what he called a "good solid think". Now that he had definitely cast in his lot for a time with the Bahima, he was not inclined to let the grass grow under his feet. First of all he reviewed the situation. He saw no reason to doubt the people's conviction that the Arabs would return in great strength. He had but a small force of fighting-men under his control, quite inadequate to cope with even such a force as had met his uncle. From all accounts he might expect to have to deal with a host of some eight hundred Arabs, armed with rifles--not the surest of marksmen, perhaps, but formidable by reason of the moral effect of firearms, at any rate. In addition, there were probably thousands of irregulars with them, man for man, no doubt, equal in quality to his own troops. Against this huge number what availed his five or six hundred?

He thought of making an appeal to the Free State authorities, whose interest it must surely be to stamp out the Arab pests. But Boma, their capital, and, indeed, all of their regular stations, were so far away that months must pass before a properly-equipped force could reach him, even if the authorities cared to undertake the campaign. When he left England the papers were full of references to the financial difficulties of the Congo Free State, which, if all that rumour said was true, did not possess the means to cope with the small risings that constantly recurred in different parts of the country.

The Arabs, for their part, as Tom learnt afterwards, were careful not to fall foul of the Free State authorities unless they were directly attacked, as in the case of the ill-fated column cut up by Tom's captors months before. They had already suffered severely, and knew that they existed in a measure on sufferance; for which reason they now confined their depredations to remote districts in which the supremacy of the Free State was merely nominal, and where they were comparatively safe from molestation. News of their nefarious raids did indeed filter through to Europe, but merely as intertribal fights. The Free State officials were probably in no uncertainty as to the real nature of these events, but inasmuch as the Arabs were the means of forwarding a considerable quantity of ivory and rubber to the trading centres, their methods were not too deeply investigated, if they were not actually winked at.

All this Tom only learnt in course of time; but he knew and suspected enough already to be convinced that the only hope of dealing a successful blow at the raiders lay in using the material ready to hand. Mwonga's people were too few in number to cope with the Arabs unaided; but there must be many villages in the surrounding country whose interests lay in making common cause against the common enemy. Here another difficulty faced him at once. As had been shown by the reply given to one of the messengers sent out during the siege,

a combination of African chiefs was no easy thing to effect. They were all jealous of one another; suspicious of being led into a trap; unwilling to put themselves at the orders of any one chief in supreme command. Yet no other course would meet the case, and Tom resolved to make the attempt, hoping that a European, who had already won their respect, might succeed where an African would almost certainly fail. The news of Barega's great victory, and the fame of his own share in it, would spread, within a few days, far and wide through the country; indeed, the contingents which had come into the village for protection were already beginning to scatter to their several homes. "A few days for the leaven to work," thought Tom, "and then I'll send out messengers to several of the chiefs within thirty miles, asking them to attend a grand palaver with me. And as I suppose they'll be madly jealous if I ask them outright to come into this village, we shall have to fix on neutral ground for the meeting. I'll go and consult my friend the katikiro."

Msala cordially agreed with the plan proposed, and messengers were at once selected for the mission. Four of the neighbouring chiefs were invited to repair, on the eighth day, to a hill some five miles distant from Mwonga's village, each bringing seven of his principal men, there to meet Kuboko, as representing Mwonga, with an equal number. At the same time two runners, in accordance with Msala's promise, were sent eastwards, to make the best of their way towards the Nyanza, and to inform any white men they might meet of the presence of Kuboko in their village. Tom found it quite impossible to get them to pronounce his name, and there was not a scrap of paper in the place; but he worked his surname on a piece of linen, with the aid of clumsy wooden needles borrowed from one of Barega's widows, and gave that to one of the couriers.

Having a week to spend before the grand palaver, Tom, with his usual energy, adopted measures to improve the military efficiency of the force. This he knew would be a matter of time and patience, and it was important to begin at once. His first care, naturally, was to strengthen their *moral*. He singled out the men who had distinguished themselves in the recent fighting, and had also shown general evidence of intelligence and aptitude, and these he placed in command of companies of a hundred men each. He selected a hundred to act as a body-guard to himself and the chief, and six of them, in addition to the katikiro, formed a sort of staff. There was great eagerness among the warriors to be enrolled among this special corps, and Tom decided to make enrolment in it a reward for good service. He drilled the men with particular care, and was gratified by the readiness with which they obeyed him, the exact attention they paid to all his instructions, and the quickness they showed in carrying them out.

On the second day after the defeat of the Arabs, Tom ordered the rescued slaves to be paraded before him, and offered them the alternatives of immediate

freedom, in which case they would have to shift for themselves, and enrolment in the military force. They were delighted at the chance of fighting their late masters, and nine-tenths of them joyfully accepted the offer of service. A man who has been a slave, indeed, is usually very loth to accept absolute freedom, for he has become so accustomed to dependence as to lose all will-power, and the loss of a master means the loss of the means of living. The slaves were a very mixed lot, almost every tribe for a hundred miles round being represented among them--tall men and short men, cannibals and vegetarians; but Tom hoped that a little regular training and the memory of their past sufferings would induce a kind of *esprit de corps*, and that in course of time they would prove a useful addition to the force. He had to contend with symptoms of jealousy and dislike among his own people, but by combined tact and firmness he succeeded in preventing any serious squabbles.

In Barega's time private quarrels among the people had been settled with the knife, and public offences purged by means of various ordeals invented by the medicine-man. To put a stop to such rough-and-ready methods, Tom appointed a court, consisting of the chief officials and himself, to hear complaints and try cases, meeting three times a week in the compound of his hut. The African is very ready to experiment, and is especially delighted with anything in the way of ceremonial where he has a chance to exhibit his oratorical power. He is also quick to appreciate true justice, so that Tom found his court a success, if somewhat trying to his patience because of its long-windedness. Mabruki, however, deeply resented his deposition from the office of lord chief-justice, and added this to the heavy grudge he already bore Kuboko.

With five hundred and fifty warriors and about two hundred and fifty freed slaves, Tom found himself in command of an effective force of eight hundred men, excluding boys under sixteen, who were drafted into a cadet corps, the nucleus of which already existed in the late chief's mutuma or "boys' brigade". Four hours every day were devoted to teaching the troops the elements of drill--just sufficient to give them cohesion and enable them to perform the simpler evolutions. Two hours were given to special drill--the throwing up of breastworks, for instance, for protection from rifle fire. It was, he thought, his special good fortune that the sergeant-major who instructed the cadet corps at school had taken the keenest interest in his profession, and had given the cadets under his charge a real liking for their work. Tom saw that only by superior discipline could he hope to counterbalance the superior armament and greater numbers of the Arabs.

From the outset he had to face a difficulty in the want of firearms and ammunition. As a result of their recent victory the Bahima had become possessors of some two hundred rifles and muskets; but even with these they would make but a poor show against the hundreds of well-armed Arabs whom they might have to

encounter. Besides, the ammunition recovered from the water was insignificant. There were a few unspoilt kegs of powder, and a few cases of cartridges for the rifles, but they were barely sufficient to provide eighty rounds a man. Further, as only a few of his troops had ever handled a gun of any kind, there would scarcely be more than enough ammunition to give the learners sufficient musketry practice. Tom was appalled, when he began to instruct them, at the waste due to their timidity, and to their tendency to use their weapons as playthings. Yet, with two hundred serviceable weapons, it seemed a pity that they should be useless, and he wondered whether by some means or other a further supply of at least powder might not be obtained.

On the third day after the despatch of the messengers, it occurred to him that it might be possible to manufacture some powder. From his earliest years he had been fond of "messing", as unappreciative seniors put it, from the making of toffee to the more or less successful manufacture of fireworks. He had picked up at odd times also, owing to this scientific curiosity, a certain working acquaintance with various industrial processes not directly connected with marine engineering, and knew that the constituents of gunpowder may be easily prepared from the raw material. But there was the rub; the absence of any one of the constituents would render the others useless. In the Congo Forest, with its hundreds of thousands of square miles of dense woodland, extending over a space as large as France and Spain together, there would be no lack of wood for charcoal; saltpetre he had found in considerable quantities within a mile from the village; but in addition to these a supply of sulphur was needed, and where was he to look for that?

While thinking over the problem he remembered that during his illness he had been entertained by the katikiro with a long story of a malignant spirit inhabiting a certain mountain some six hours' march to the south-east of the village. As a boy the katikiro could remember this terrible being bursting forth in a large sheet of flame from the bowels of the mountain, with a horrible rumbling sound that shook the solid earth for miles around, casting immense rocks miles up into the air, engulfing the surrounding country in a cloud of smoke and fire, and turning the streams into rivers of boiling mud. Many villages with all their inhabitants had been utterly destroyed; even in Barega's the shower of cinders from the sky set fire to several of the huts. For years afterwards the mountain gave off dense clouds of smoke; but these gradually ceased, and the evil spirit had since then been quiet. Nevertheless nobody from Barega's or any of the neighbouring villages had ventured to approach the mountain since these fearful happenings.

Remembering this, Tom guessed that the scene of this eruption, which was apparently an isolated peak, was connected with the great Central African volcanic system extending from Lake Kivu to the Semliki. On his march from Lake Mazingo on the track of his uncle's expedition he had passed over ground that

was evidently of volcanic origin; and he surmised that this part of Central Africa had at some time or other been the scene of enormous volcanic activities. The important fact now, however, was that a volcano known to have been active was in his immediate neighbourhood. He knew that sulphurous fumes were thrown off from volcanoes; was there any chance of finding sulphur itself in any workable form on the slope of this adjacent mountain? It was worth trying, and he resolved to make a careful examination of the ground.

Next day, then, accompanied by Mbutu, half a dozen hunters to procure game, and twenty steady Bairo armed with picks and shovels, he set out with this object. He had some difficulty at first in overcoming the superstitious fears of his followers. Mbutu interpreted their objections, which, recited by their spokesman in fear and trembling and much grovelling on the earth, were quite unintelligible to Tom.

"This man say him berrah poor; him no can buy charms. Evil spirit plenty too much strong, him burn up black man in big fire; hot mud drown black man; smoke choke black man. Sah no afraid, no, no; him white man, big medicine; black man him no medicine, afraid too much too much."

Remembering the proverbial pill to cure the earthquake, Tom solemnly handed to each of his followers an empty cartridge-case, which he explained was the strongest magic he possessed against the spirit of the mountain. The device gave him some qualms; but he remembered that Dr. Arbuthnot himself, the great eighteenth-century physician, had practised similar innocent deceptions on noble lords, and he felt that in this case the end justified the means.

The road for nearly half the distance was fairly easy, but it then became very rugged, and progress was slow and laborious. Tom found many traces of game, and in one place, approaching down wind, the party disturbed a large herd of elephants. Tom resisted the impulse to pursue them, although it cost him an effort, and pressed forward towards the peak, which was visible as a truncated cone of no great height, for the most part bare, but showing here and there patches of scrub and belts of forest growth. The party had started early in the day, but it was nearing sunset when they arrived within climbing distance of the peak, and Tom decided to camp for the night and begin prospecting next morning. Making an early start, he was on the slopes of the mountain not long after dawn, and then began a toilsome search for traces of sulphur in workable form. He felt sure that thousands of tons of the desired substance lay around him, but unless he could find it in the free state, or at least mechanically mixed with earth, with the rough-and-ready appliances he could devise on the spot it would be quite beyond his reach.

His first step was to build a fire on the slopes of the mountain, and place two men in charge of it, with instructions to pile on a plentiful supply of fuel. Then,

dividing his men into squads of four, he made a series of excavations in various spots simultaneously, going from one to another to examine the earth that was dug up. Several times he thought he had discovered the object of his quest, and a number of basketfuls of earth were carried to the improvised furnace. There the ore was heaped into a pile and ignited from the top, in the hope that the heat above would melt any sulphur that might be contained in the lower part of the mass, and cause it to run down into the specially-prepared cavity at the bottom. This process was a wasteful one, but it had the merit of simplicity, and Tom knew that if only a sufficient quantity of sulphur-bearing earth could be obtained it would serve his purpose.

After several disappointments he at last came upon undoubted traces of sulphur from the combustion of a quantity of earth obtained very close to the crater. He wished to make another trial, but it was growing late, and his men implored him not to remain on the mountain after nightfall. His magic might suffice for the day, but nothing could preserve them from the wrath of Irungo if he found them within his gates during the hours of darkness. Their terror was so extreme that Tom reluctantly withdrew to the site of the previous night's camp; but at the first streak of daylight he roused his men, who were feeling the effects of their unaccustomed labours, and after breakfast led them back to the spot at which the only promising find of the previous day had been made. Removing nearly half a ton of earth, he made the experiment this time on a larger scale, and when the mass had burned for some two hours he was delighted to find a considerable quantity of crude sulphur in the little cavity beneath the pile. He had used up a large amount of wood in the process, for there was not sufficient sulphur in the ore materially to assist the process of combustion, but there was fortunately no lack of fuel within a few hundred yards of the place from which the ore was taken, and by nightfall Tom was in possession of some lumps of a dirty-brown substance which, when refined, might yield half their weight of pure sulphur. When darkness fell he piled up an unusually large heap of the ore, left a fire smouldering above it, and was rewarded in the morning with a correspondingly large quantity of crude sulphur in the receiver.

"This is glorious!" he said to Mbutu. "We have a good many pounds of stuff now; the next thing is to see if sufficiently pure sulphur can be refined from it to make powder. We can't do that here, at any rate; and besides, to-morrow is the day fixed for our grand palaver, so I think we must be content for the present with what we have, and come again if we find it successful. One thing is certain," his unspoken thought continued, "there's enough sulphur on this mountain to make powder for all the army corps in the world, and if only there were means of transit it might pay someone to lease it from the Congo Government. For all I know, in fact, I may be trespassing; but I fancy the authorities won't mind much if they

hear about it and know what I am doing it for.--Well, my men, now for home. We have got what I wanted, and, as you see, haven't been molested by Irungo. You won't mind coming again, eh?"

They returned to the village with their load. A mile before they reached it, Mbutu all at once drew his master's attention to a fresh trail crossing their path from the east. There were the clear marks of men's feet, and also of small hoofs, which Mbutu declared were the hoof-marks of donkeys.

"It looks as though a caravan of some sort were making for our village," said Tom. "Surely it cannot be Arabs?"

"No, sah; white man, sah. Donkeys; must be white man. Oh yes!"

"You don't mean to imply any close relationship between white men and donkeys? You don't understand? Well, never mind. But I do hope that our affairs are not to be complicated by entirely unnecessary Europeans."

As he approached, he discerned unmistakeable signs of excitement in the village. Those of the people who were not engaged in their regular occupations were crowding towards the centre; and, looking over their heads from his higher position, Tom saw a smaller group, composed of the katikiro and some other of the principal men, gathered about a tall broad figure in white clothes and white topee, whose back at the moment was towards the gate by which Tom had entered. With him were several tall natives whose dress distinguished them as strangers, and at one point four well-laden donkeys were tethered, the object of great interest to all the urchins of the place.

"Hullo!" said Tom to himself, "this is very curious. There's decidedly a commercial look about that fellow, and I seem to know his back, too. Who in the world can it be? Some trader, perhaps, I caught sight of casually at Mombasa or Kisumu, though I wonder what brings him to these remote parts. He's well armed; those rifles look uncommonly like Mausers. And there's a revolver in his belt. This is interesting."

Ordering his party to dispose of their loads and place the sulphur in the courtyard of his hut, he approached quietly, and entered the chattering crowd by a gap opened for him. In the centre of the crowd the stranger stood in a clear space, two leather cases open on the ground in front of him.

"By Jove!" Tom said to himself, as he came within a yard of the stranger, who had not as yet perceived him, "I'm hanged if it isn't Schwab, gold spectacles and all! He's diligent in business, if ever a man was. Fancy trapesing out here with a caravan! Wonder what he's trying to gammon the katikiro into buying! I declare he's whipped out his note-book and is actually entering orders. I must look into this!"

Now at this time Kuboko presented a wholly different appearance from the Tom Burnaby of a few months before. His face and neck were scorched to a deep

brick-red, save where they were covered with nearly five months' growth of hair. His form had filled out somewhat after he recovered from his illness. His clothes were indescribable. On his head, to keep off the sun's rays, he wore a calico head-dress of his own invention. He might have passed for a particularly fine and rather less than usually solemn Arab, and altogether he was not far wrong in his belief that not one of his friends would at first sight have recognized him. Consequently, when the respectful greetings of the katikiro and his friends at length apprised Herr Schwab that someone of importance had arrived, he turned and saw what he supposed to be a handsome young Arab, whose presence in a Bahima village was sufficiently surprising.

Tom could not resist the temptation to have a little fun. Having addressed a few authoritative words in their own tongue to the Bahima, he salaamed to the German, and stood as though awaiting an explanation. Schwab meanwhile had been taking stock of the supposed Arab, and having been unable to come to any conclusion about him, he turned to the native follower who was acting as interpreter, and through him asked whom he had the honour of addressing. Tom signed to Mbutu, who at once explained that it was, indeed, a great honour, since Kuboko was the acting chief of the village, which contained some two thousand five hundred souls, the biggest village between Tanganyika and the Nile. The German at once expressed his high consideration for his friend Kuboko--he thought he might call him his friend?--and he would be most happy if he could do some business with him. Perhaps his friend Kuboko knew a little English, for if he did, their intercourse would, he thought, be much facilitated.

"Yes," said Tom slowly, "I do know English a little; it will be good to speak English; business are business."

"Fery goot, my friend," said the German. "I am fery glad. Now, I represent, vat you call stand for, ze great export house of Schlagintwert in Düsseldorf, and I can sell you anyzink--yes, anyzink at all, from Sheffield cutlery to Scotch visky. Yes, ve make in Düsseldorf a particularly goot brant of real old Scotch visky. Ve make also Birmingham screws, and Paisley sread; ve make Cumberland lead pencils and, vat you vill like ze best of all, Manchester soft goots--all made in Germany, my friend, and our terms are fipercentforcash. I say cash, but I mean to say, of course, ivory, or rubber, or anyzink else of vorth. Now, not often hafe I ze pleasure to meet a zhentleman vat speak English in zese parts, and I am fery glad, fery glad indeed. I hafe just booked ze goot black man for vun gross of pin-packetts, and I shall trust to take your essteemed orders for anyzink--anyzink vatefer, fipercentforcash, zanking you in an-ti-ci-pa-tion."

Tom could stand it no longer. Smothering a laugh, he clapped a hand on the astonished German's shoulder, and said:

"Pig-iron? What about pig-iron, Herr Schwab?"

"Ach! meine Güte!" exclaimed Schwab, his broad face one startled note of interrogation, "who ze----who zen are you?"

He mopped his face with a red handkerchief, still holding his pocket-book open in the other hand.

"Don't you remember Tom Burnaby, on board the *Peninsular*, and your kind offer of any number of tons of pig-iron?"

"Goot heafens!"

"And I saw you at Kisumu, don't you know."

"Oh, I do know! yes; I do know indeed; and you vent after your oncle--vat you call vild-goose hunt. But, but--pardon me, Mr. Burnaby, you hafe taken my breass avay quite. You are like a--vat you call gorilla, Mr. Burnaby."

"Just what I thought myself," rejoined Tom with a laugh. "I'm getting acclimatized! But I haven't quite forgotten civilized ways, and I'm uncommonly glad to see you. It's I don't know how long since I spoke to a European, and if you'll come along to my hut I'll give you some Bass's ale or Devonshire cider (brewed in Mwonga, as we call this village), and anything else you like to order--prime Scotch beef, you know, and Southdown mutton; or Frankfort *Bratwurst*, eh? and we can have a comfortable talk and clear up a few inexplicables. But, first of all, my dear Herr Schwab, I must ask you to cancel that order for pins. The katikiro has never seen a pin in his life, I fancy."

"Oh, but indeed he has! I hafe showed him a packett. He vas fery delighted. He gafe me order for vun gross, spot-price: fipercentforcash."

"And how many pins in a packet, may I ask?"

"Hundert, or, because my packetts are particularly fine, perhaps hundert ten."

"Ah! and a gross is twelve dozen, I believe, according to Cocker. Well now, that will make--let me see--fifteen thousand eight hundred and forty pins. Is that right?"

"No doubt at all; I could not do it so quick; but my house vill not be particular about vun score or two. Say sixteen tousand pins, Mr. Burnaby, and all zat big lot for vun tusk of ivory!"

"And what do you think my katikiro will do with sixteen thousand pins? You really are too funny, Herr Schwab. Look at the extent of his waist-cloth! No, I am very sorry, but I really must forbid the transaction. Between ourselves, Msala is a bit of a wag, and as likely as not he would make pin-cushions of all his dearest friends and get me into no end of hot water. No; cancel that order, and we'll see if we can do business in some other of your innumerable articles."

"Fery vell, Mr. Burnaby; now zat is a promise--vat you call vun deal, is it not? Fery vell. But I am amazed. I am indeed ass-tounded, to find my young friend chief of a natife village. It is vonderful, it is incr-redible! I hafe not yet recofered

from ze stroke. I vould indeed like some lager beer, lager beer from München; it vould help me con-sid-er-ably to vat you call digest ze vonderful information."

"I can't promise you real lager from München, or real Bass from Stuttgart," said Tom, laughing; "but you'll find our marwa very like cider, and we can supply plenty of that--say two and a half per cent for cash."

"Ah! Now you laugh at me! You are vat you call sly dog, eh? Hoch, zen! Vun glass of marwa, and zen egsplain ze position. Vonderful! Vonderful!"

CHAPTER XVI

The Making of an Army

An Embargo--Federation--Gunpowder--An Object-Lesson--The Great Palaver--After Many Years--Pikes--The Call to Arms

In the exchange of confidences Herr Schwab informed Tom that he had been for several months wandering about with his donkeys and his samples, booking orders for his firm. He had for the most part confined himself to the villages in the vicinity of the Victoria Nyanza; but having heard rumours of a large body of Arabs who were in possession of plentiful stores of ivory, he had recently left German East Africa and come rapidly northwards. He had heard nothing whatever of the fate of Major Burnaby's expedition, and could not answer Tom's eager enquiries for his friends; indeed, he had met no Europeans except his own compatriots since he left Kisumu. He heard Tom's story, modestly told as it was, with mingled amazement and incredulity. But there was no gainsaying the fact that the young Englishman was virtually chief of a large Bahima village, and Schwab was not the man to lose any opportunity for trade. Learning that an Arab attack was expected, and that Tom's pressing necessity was arms and ammunition, he offered to smuggle in some Mausers from German East Africa, as of course he could not import arms openly into the territory of the Congo Free State.

"Can't think of it," said Tom decisively. "If it's against the rules that's enough for me. We must play the game, you know. Besides, I'm going to try to make some gunpowder myself."

"Ach!" exclaimed the German with a shrug, "certainly you vill burn your fingers, my young friend. But now, vat can I do for you?"

"Fetch in your packages and let me see what you have."

When the bags were opened Tom at once marked a Colt revolver.

"That's mine," he said; "a pretty thing, by Jove! And you've cartridges for it! And I'll take that Waterbury I see there; made in Germany, of course. And three of those pocket-books, with a dozen lead-pencils; and that comb; and a tooth-brush. Have you a tooth-brush? That's the very thing. You've a razor too; I'd take that if you had a looking-glass. I'd like to get rid of this fur on my cheeks, but I'm afraid I should gash myself horribly without a glass. What--you have one? Capital; and a shaving-brush too, I see, and soap. Why, Schwab, what a universal provider you are! There's one thing I'd give a great deal for, and that's a pound of tea, Mazawattee or anything else. Haven't any? Then I must do without. You have some quinine, I see; that'll always come in handy. I think that's about all. Now, how much does that come to?"

"Ten pound," said the German instantly.

"What! Ten pounds for those few things! Why, it's ruinous! How do you make out the bill?"

"I gif no bill. I hafe vat you call mon-o-po-ly, my young friend. It is take it or leafe it, I do not mind."

"Business are business, indeed! Well, I want the things. I can do without the watch and the pocket-books, perhaps. How much then?"

"Ten pound; I hafe only vun price."

"You old Shylock! Well, I haven't the cash, so I can't expect the five per cent, but I'll give you an order on my uncle. I suppose that'll satisfy you?"

"Oh yes! ze British officer vat you call pay opp. I vill feel quite safe."

"Very well. Heavens! how funny it is to hold a pencil again! There you are: 'Pay Herr Schwab on sight ten pounds (£10). Tom Burnaby'. That'll do, eh?"

"All correct, my young friend. And now, vat more can I do for you?"

"I hardly like to ask you, but would you mind--pray don't hesitate to say so--would you mind cutting my hair?"

"You hafe done me vell, Mr. Burnaby; I do not mind. I vill cut your hair, and sell you ze scissors."

"Fire away, then, and don't dig into my skin, will you?"

Schwab turned up his sleeves, tucked a long yellow scarf from his variety bundle round Tom's neck, and cropped him close, with no more than the usual stabs and pricks. Then Tom escorted him round his little domain, and gratified him with an order for various tools and implements. He remained overnight as Tom's guest, and started early in the morning northwards to visit the Arabs.

Before he left, Tom warned him that he might find the Arabs rather unpleasant customers. But Schwab puffed himself out and waved the warning away.

"Vat!" he said, "the Arabs vill not dare do anyzink to me, a Gairman! Our Kaiser, who is in Berlin--he vould know ze reason vy if vun hair of my head vas

touched."

"You Germans are lucky," laughed Tom. "The King isn't so particular about my hair! Besides, it's not much good knowing after the event. You're out of reach of an army corps, you know, or even a telegram."

"I am not vun small bit afraid. I hafe my Mausers. I hafe my revolver; besides, I go to sell ammunition, and zat ze Arabs vill alvays be most glad to get."

"I must put my veto on that. I fear, Mr. Schwab, you don't quite realize the situation. I have every sympathy with legitimate trade--we British are a trading nation; but as matters stand I must regard rifles as contraband of war. Sell the Arabs pins and milking-pails and anything else you like, but no arms or ammunition. In fact, I shall have to ask you to leave your cases of ammunition here, taking with you only enough to serve your immediate needs. I can't have arms put into my enemy's hands. And you're smuggling, you know; you'd get into hot water if the Free State people knew. I'll keep your ammunition safe until you return. And another thing, Herr Schwab. You'll be good enough to give the Arabs no information about me or the village. I'm not sure that as a precaution I oughtn't to prevent your getting to them at all, but I don't want to be unfriendly. It's understood, then, that you keep to yourself all that you have seen here?"

The German tried for half an hour to wriggle out of the dilemma, but Tom told him flatly at last that on no other conditions would he be allowed to proceed; and he at last submitted with a shrug.

Half an hour after Schwab had gone Tom started with Mbutu, the katikiro, the kasegara, the principal drummer, and three other officials, for the hill to which the chiefs had been summoned for palaver. They all arrived at the rendezvous, and for five long hours Tom patiently explained and argued and explained again, striving with infinite tact to dispel their suspicions and to persuade them of the ultimate advantage they would all derive from co-operation. Coached beforehand in definite details by the katikiro, he reminded them of the ravages from which they had already suffered; of the villages burnt to the ground, the crops destroyed, the ruthless massacres, the brutal mutilations, the hundreds captured as slaves. He touched a tender spot when he spoke of the immense treasures of ivory of which the Arabs had despoiled them--ivory which their own skill as hunters had obtained, and which they might have sold profitably to the Free State Government or to merchants. Lastly, finding it necessary to take a leaf out of the African's own book, he spoke of himself, of the Great White King, of his own deeds against the Arabs, and said that only if they fell in with his proposal could they hope to deal a final crushing blow at the Arab power. The chiefs were more and more impressed, and at length one of them said that only one thing was still needed to bring him under Kuboko's banner. He had heard great stories of Kuboko's big medicine; if Kuboko would exhibit his magic and convince him by the evidence of his own

eyes, he would willingly call Kuboko brother and follow him as his great chief.

Tom instantly agreed, and the katikiro fairly danced with merriment. Nothing could be more effectual, Tom thought, than his final performance with the medicine-man, so he invited the chiefs in turn to knock him down if they could. They showed at first some reluctance, but Msala assured them that Kuboko would bear them no malice. Thus reassured they advanced in turn, and in a very few minutes all three were sitting on the ground, laughing uproariously at their own mishaps, while the katikiro and his friends made the countryside resound with their boisterous "Hoo! hoo! hoo!" No further proof was required; the chiefs signified their adhesion to the proposed confederation, and declared that they were ready, on a day to be fixed, formally to become Kuboko's blood-brothers.

This being achieved, Tom spent another hour in explaining the details of the federation. Each chief, as soon as the approach of the Arabs was signalled, was to place himself unreservedly at Tom's orders, and bring his contingent into the field. They could each promise about two hundred men. The signal would be given in the usual way by drums, and to ensure early information Tom intimated that he would arrange a series of posts about three miles apart, extending for some thirty miles into the forest, in the direction from which the Arabs might be expected. As soon as the enemy was sighted, the fact would be announced by drums from post to post; but in order to provide against the possibility of mistake a message would also be conveyed by runners.

One of the conditions of the alliance was that each member of the confederacy bound himself to assist in the rebuilding of any village that might be destroyed, and Tom was especially careful in explaining the reason.

"You see, my brothers," he said, "you will not wish to leave your villages feeling that during your absence, and owing to your absence, they may be burnt, and your wives and children thus rendered homeless. But by accepting my plan, when the drum tells you that the Arabs are coming, you may rush to join me with every confidence; for if your villages are destroyed, you know that all your brothers, yes, and I myself, will help to build them up again. And so you will have new huts for old. Is it well, my brothers?"

There were grunts of acquiescence.

"There is one other thing," Tom continued. "The Arabs, if they come in the large numbers that we expect, will range the country far and wide for food. Then I recommend you, if at this late season of the year you have still any of your crops unreaped, or any of your food-roots in the ground, to gather in all that you can, and dig deep pits in secret places, and there store your harvest. It is not well that we should feed the Arabs."

The chiefs again showed by their grunts that they found Kuboko's recommendation good.

"Now I want you, when you return to your own villages, to call up all the petty chiefs who look up to you, the chiefs of tens and twenties and thirties, and explain to them what we have talked about to-day. If they agree to come in with us, you will bring them to a grand palaver on this same hillside eight days from now. Every man will carry his arms, and come equipped as for war."

Tom was thoroughly tired out when he got back to the village. He had intended to write, in one of the note-books he had obtained from Schwab, a brief jotting of recent events, for future reference, but he put off that till next morning. When morning came, however, he was too anxious to begin his experiments in powder-making to spend any time in penning records. He had a large quantity of crude sulphur and saltpetre to refine, and he was by no means sure that with the rough apparatus at hand he would be successful. That could easily be tested, and he at once set about his preparations for the task.

He got a number of large earthen pots of all shapes and sizes, and broke up the rough dirty rolls of sulphur into these. Then he heated them gently over slow fires, and found, as he had hoped, that the earthy impurities gradually settled at the bottom, leaving the pure sulphur, a liquid like treacle, at the top. This he ladled off into clean vessels.

So far so good. The next thing was the saltpetre which had been collected by the women. This also he put into vessels, and dissolved the crude solid in water. Raising the mixture to the boiling-point, he allowed it to cool gradually, and watched for the result. The pure saltpetre was deposited in a solid crystalline mass at the bottom.

Here then were two of the necessary constituents; the third was easily obtained, for the katikiro had admirably carried out his instructions, and had personally superintended the cutting and carrying of an immense quantity of splendid wood from the forest, which was easily converted into charcoal by heating it in closed vessels.

Nothing now remained but to mix these ingredients.

"We must take care it isn't bang! soosh! black man all dead," said Tom to Mbutu, who, with all the other officials, was taking the keenest interest in the experiments. "I think we had better build a shed half a mile away, so that if there is an explosion it will do no harm except to me and you and my assistants."

"Sah no go," said Mbutu. "Me go; make bang stuff; blow up; all same for one."

"No, my boy, that won't do. Why, the people here would lose all faith in me if I was afraid to take my own big medicine. No; we'll set about running up a shed at once, and take care to avoid risks as much as possible. Two men with you and me will be enough to do the mixing, at first, at any rate, and you may choose them out of your own friends."

A wooden shed was soon fixed up on an open space far from trees or bush, and Tom arranged to begin work before dawn next day, so as to get some mixing done before the sun was high. He was not at all sure about the proportions in which the three constituents ought to be mixed, but hoped to find that out by experiment. Just as the darkness began to clear he went out to the shed with Mbutu alone to make a first attempt in private. It was unsuccessful; the mixture burnt readily enough, but without explosion. He guessed from his failure that the quantity of saltpetre in his first mixture had not been sufficient, and, carefully measuring out his quantities in a small brass cup, he increased the amount little by little, testing a portion of the mixture after each addition, until at last he was rewarded with a decided explosion which reverberated in a hundred echoes, and was answered by the banging of the sentry's drum in the village. Tom laughed with almost childish delight at the success of his efforts, and, taking careful note of the proportions he had finally arrived at, he returned to the village.

Next morning he took out the two Bahima selected by Mbutu, and found that not only were they quick to learn, but, what is more important in a native of Africa, they recognized the necessity for caution. They worked steadily till ten o'clock, and at the end of the day Tom found himself in possession of several pounds of serviceable powder. It was a queer-looking mixture, and Tom said to himself, with a laugh, that no doubt it would miserably fail to pass the Waltham test; but he knew that it would serve his purpose, and that was sufficient. Within a fortnight he had stored about half a ton in the recesses of the cavern in the cliff, and had collected in the village a large quantity of the several constituents, which only awaited mixing.

"It is a pity," he thought, "that with an almost unlimited supply of powder, we can make so little use of it. At the most we have muskets for only two hundred and fifty men, and many of these are likely to be as dangerous to us as to the enemy. With the powder we already have we could supply a brigade for a month's campaign. But surely it can be used in some other way?"

In the event of another siege the store of powder would, he knew, be invaluable for mining purposes; but he wished to find some method by which it could be turned to account in field operations. At last he hit upon an idea. Why not lay in a supply of hand-grenades? He could not, of course, with the limited supply of metal in the village, and the still more limited smithy arrangements, manufacture bombs with a metal case; but after some cogitation he found a means of surmounting this difficulty. The grenades, he thought, might be made of thick pottery, encased in a double or triple envelope of elastic wicker-work, the latter intended to prevent the bomb, when thrown, from bursting before the fuse had time to do its work. In the manufacture of this outer envelope Tom relied on the extreme ingenuity of the Bahima in all kinds of basket-weaving; and his expecta-

tions in this respect were more than realized. Experimenting first with a dummy shell, he found that, protected by the wicker covering, it could be thrown to a distance of forty or fifty yards without breaking the earthenware container. This was quite sufficient for his purpose.

"I think," he said to the katikiro, who was watching his experiments with mingled wonder and amusement, "that we shall be able to give the Arabs more than one surprise if they visit us again. I want you to get your potters and weavers to make two dozen more jars after this pattern; Mbutu will take them, together with a large basketful of granite chips, to the shed where we made the powder. We shall see to-morrow whether these little jars are going to be of use to us."

On the following morning Tom went with Mbutu to the powder-shed, which had always been made taboo to the villagers. There he half-filled one of the jars with granite chips (all the available iron scraps being required for the muskets), and rammed in on the top a bursting-charge of gunpowder. Into the neck of the jar he fitted a plug, through which a hole was bored for the insertion of a time fuse. In the preparation of the fuse Tom's school-boy experiments in pyrotechny stood him in good stead. Some cotton fibre steeped in a solution of saltpetre fully answered his purpose. His next step was to erect a framework of match-boarding to serve as a target. Stationing himself behind an earthen breastwork about forty yards from the target, he set fire to the fuse of his trial bomb and, hurling it at the target, dropped to the ground behind the entrenchment. There he waited for some seconds until a loud report showed that his grenades could at least be trusted to explode; some small fragments dropped within a few feet of his shelter. Stepping up to the target, he found it pitted in a dozen places with dents due to the granite chips, some of which were driven some distance into the wood. There was no doubt that had a body of men been within a few feet of the bomb when it exploded, not many would have survived.

Tom's next concern was to ensure, first, that the fuse should be perfectly trustworthy, and secondly, that the bursting-charge of powder should not be so great as to bring the grenadiers themselves within the danger-zone. It required two or three days of careful experiment before he was satisfied on these points. Then he instructed the katikiro to select twenty potters and twice as many weavers to manufacture a large supply of bombs; and under his own and Mbutu's supervision these were carefully charged in the shed, and stowed away in the cavern on the cliff. The provision of a number of plug-bayonets by the village smiths completed his experiments in the preparation of warlike stores.

On the day before the general palaver, the katikiro came to Tom and informed him that the chief who had so insolently dismissed Barega's messenger during the siege had come into the village with a retinue, and had very humbly asked to see Kuboko.

"Ah!" said Tom; "he has come round, has he? Bring him up."

The chief and his men drew near very much as whipped dogs would have done. Within ten yards of Tom's hut they flung themselves on their faces, and wriggled their way with ludicrous contortions towards him. He thought it a good opportunity for teaching the whole village a salutary lesson, so he summoned the people by beat of drum, and ordered them to stand round. Then he severely asked the fawning chief his name and business.

"O Kuboko, great master, my name is Uchunku," said the man. "I am weaker than a dog, smaller than a flea. Nothing that I have but is mine by the mercy of Kuboko. I have heard of Kuboko's mighty power, and I fall on my face, for no man can stand upright in the presence of the man of big medicine. I have heard, O Kuboko, of the wonderful thrower that casts mountains as high as the very stars of heaven; and of the mighty flood that flowed from the hollow of Kuboko's hand, and upon which the Arabs were swept away even as leaves upon the torrent. All this have I heard, and more, and I come to put my neck under Kuboko's foot, and beg him to gird my village about with his mighty magic."

Tom let the man grovel there, and paused before he answered. Then he upbraided him for his meanness and folly in refusing help to his neighbour Barega when in dire extremity, and declared that he deserved to be left to meet single-handed the devastating Arabs.

"You are a coward, Uchunku," he said. "You stood aloof from your neighbour in distress, and then, when you find that all your other neighbours have seen the wisdom of joining my people and accepting my leadership, you come and whine like a puppy to be taken in. I will have mercy on you; I will admit you to our confederacy; but you will have to prove yourself worthy. You will be given no place of trust, your men will not be allowed to bear arms, until you have shown that you are loyal, and ready to carry out all my commands."

The miserable chief abjectly promised to do anything, even the most menial work, to merit Kuboko's favour. Tom cut him short, bade him get up, and ordered him to attend the palaver next day with all his men.

Tom would have been more than human if he had not felt a thrill and glow of pride next day, when, at the appointed mote-hill, he found a great concourse of natives awaiting him. The three chiefs of the former palaver had most effectively fulfilled his instructions. Each had brought a group of petty chiefs, and each of these had come with several of his warriors, so that the whole assembly numbered nearly three hundred men, armed in their several ways. They were Bantu negroes of various races, some of them tall, splendid specimens of humanity, some short and thick-set, all muscular and in the pink of physical condition. Until Tom came in sight with his small escort, they had kept up a constant chatter, the sound of which travelled across the country like the noise of a vast army of rooks or gulls.

But as Tom ascended the hill a silence fell upon the throng. Hundreds of eyes looked curiously at the man of whom they had heard so much. When he reached the brow of the hill, moved as by one impulse the crowd raised their spears aloft and cried aloud: "Kuboko! Kuboko! Waize! Thou comest!" and it was then that Tom thrilled with the thought that all these simple, untutored negroes were looking to him as their leader, and relying on him to save them from the awful fate they must inevitably meet if their inhuman oppressors had their will. And thus, when he had gathered them about him in a large ring, there was a deep note of earnestness in his voice as he addressed them. He thanked them first for coming so readily at his wish, and briefly explained to them the arrangements he had already made with the three superior chiefs, impressing on them the seriousness of the effort soon to be made to rid them for ever of their age-long foes, and the necessity for all to work together without jealousy or self-seeking. Much of what he said he knew must fall on deaf ears; he could not expect them to forget the habits and ideas that were part of their blood; but if he could only gain their confidence, he hoped that his personal influence and example would succeed in effecting something, however little.

When he had won their approval of his general scheme, he ventured to put to them another proposal which he felt would meet with opposition. It was that, when the great day came, they should bring all their women and children, with their valuable possessions, to Mwonga, until the fight was over. A low murmur of disapproval ran round the ring, then the negroes began to gesticulate and argue excitedly until loud shouts of "Nga! Ngabuse!" their strongest negative, filled the air. Waiting patiently through the uproar, Tom at length held up his hand, and after some minutes succeeded in stilling the storm. Then, in the same even quiet manner, he began to reason with them.

"Why do my brothers shout so loudly into the sky? Is Kuboko deaf that he cannot hear? Is he stupid that he cannot understand? I, Kuboko, have but two arms and two hands. I cannot take all my brothers into my grip and drag them whither it pleases me. No, but I speak plain words to my brothers, and if they are not good words then my brothers can go their own way. Listen, men of a hundred villages, how can you hope to hold your huts against the attack of a strong and cruel foe? See, I take this spear-shaft in my hand, I lay it across my knees and snap it in two; you could do the same. But now I take five spear-shafts together, and though I strive and strain I cannot break so much as one of them. What think you of that, my brothers?"

The old illustration, so happily remembered, had an instant effect on the keen natives, to whose minds the practical so strongly appeals. Allowing a little time for the lesson to strike home, Tom went on:

"Now, what of Mwonga? Think how it is placed--on a hill, a steep path at

one end, a precipice at one side, an ever-flowing stream, a well-kept stockade. Have we not already driven the Arabs from it, not once nor twice? I have no thought of doing favour to Mwonga. It is not my village: my village is far away, over mountains and rivers, on the other side of a big water stretching farther than any eye can see. My village awaits me, and when my work is done I long only to go back to it and see my fields and huts and the faces of my own people again. But while I am here I want to help you, and you, and you, my brothers, every one of you. Make, then, a great camp at Mwonga until the Arabs are beaten and hunted away. Only Mwonga has been able to defy them. Does any chief know of a better place? If so, let him speak."

There was a long pause. Each chief consulted with his own men. Then one of the three principal chiefs called for silence, and declared that Kuboko's words were good. A long and excited discussion ensued, until at length they agreed to Tom's proposal, provided the village could be sufficiently enlarged to contain all their dependents in case of need. Tom at once called for the services of a thousand men to extend the stockade, widen the ditch, and build new huts for the accommodation of the guests. This was also agreed to, and then Tom endeavoured to get an idea of what his total force of fighting-men would amount to. He took some time to question each chief as to the strength of his own contingent, and to make the necessary deductions due to their incurable love of boasting; but the number actually arrived at, including his own force of Bahima and Bairo, fell not far short of four thousand. Then the assembly broke up.

One of the lesser chiefs, during the latter part of the conference, had been looking with great interest at Mbutu, who stood by his master's side. He was a tall Muhima, lithe and strong, with an Egyptian cast of feature and the strange melancholy expression so characteristic of his race. Looking very puzzled, he edged gradually nearer to Mbutu, and, as Tom turned to go down the hill, took the young Muhima by both arms, and gazed searchingly into his face.

"What is it, Mbutu?" said Tom. "Come along."

"Mbutu!" ejaculated the chief; then smiled, and shook the boy's arms up and down excitedly, talking very rapidly and earnestly the while. Mbutu listened at first in fascinated amazement, but by and by his expression changed, he clasped the stranger's neck, and, turning to his master, said simply:

"Him my brudder, sah! Him Mboda!"

Then he explained. When his village had been raided and burned some years before, he had believed that he alone of the male population had escaped alive. He had seen his father and two brothers killed, and knew that the women would be carried into captivity. But it now appeared that a few of the younger men had evaded the clutches of the Arabs and got away into the forest, under the leadership of Mboda, his third brother, and that, when the danger was past, they

had returned, built a village several miles west of the one that was burned, and gradually gathered about them a few men and women of their own stock. Of this small village Mboda was now chief, and he had been among the most eager to join the coalition against the enemy he had so good reason for hating.

The delight of the brothers at their unexpected meeting was so manifest that Tom invited Mboda to return to Mwonga and stay for a few days. Mboda eagerly accepted the invitation, and sent word to his village by one of his men.

On Tom's return to Mwonga, the operations arranged were immediately put in hand and pressed on in spite of the constant rains. When the new stockade was completed, the enclosure was more than half a mile square, and there was room for the temporary accommodation of fifteen thousand people. The hole in the wall of the reservoir was filled up, so that the supply of water needed by so vast a host might be kept as large as possible; and the defences were further strengthened by a solid earthen embankment impenetrable to bullets. Another measure of Tom's, at first the cause of much grief and dismay among the Bairo, was the levelling of the banana plantation on the south-east of the village. But when the news was carried round among the allies it made a vast impression. The chiefs recognized that not they alone were required to make sacrifices, but that the people of Mwonga themselves submitted even to the loss of a flourishing plantation at the bidding of Kuboko.

But all this Tom felt was but child's play to the work of training his men. He knew, from what he had read of operations in which native troops had been engaged, in the Soudan and Kumasi, for instance, how impulsive the negro is, how prone to get out of hand, how apt to fight "off his own bat", without the least idea of co-operation. It was hopeless to attempt the training of the whole body of his allies; it would take years of vigorous drill, and the constant attention of British non-commissioned officers, to eradicate these defects and implant new ideas and habits in the native. All that he could hope to do was to bring his own men, and especially the select body of two hundred and fifty, into something like order. He worked unsparingly. He got the men to fall in in double ranks, and arranged them according to their height, making them number and form fours in the good old way he remembered at school. When it came to "Left!" and "Right!" he had some trouble at first, and the operation of changing ranks was almost too much for the Bahima, not to speak of Tom's patience. Marking time presented no difficulty, and when the willing negroes had once learned the difference between right and left it was not long before the orders "Right form", "Left form", "Move to the right in fours", and the other mystic cries of the barrack-yard, were carried out with fair precision. All these military commands Tom gave in English, and he often smiled to think of the surprise which his uncle, or any other British officer, would feel if he were dumped down suddenly one day at Mwonga's village and heard the curt

expressions of English drill bawled within the stockade.

The four hours' drill was kept up every day, and the monotony of it was compensated by the eagerness and aptness of his pupils. Before, they were a mob; now, they were gradually gaining the power to work together and becoming a serviceable force. This was strikingly shown in their volley-firing. After repeated efforts, Tom almost despaired of breaking the men of firing haphazard, anticipating the word of command, blazing with eyes shut in every possible direction. But patience won the day, and at last he was able to advance men against them in sham-fight to within twenty yards without a trigger being pulled before the word was given.

The manufacture of gunpowder having proved successful, it was a comparatively easy matter to make slugs for the muskets. Every scrap of old iron, brass, copper, lead, in the place was utilized for this purpose, and at last the musketeers were provided with sufficient ammunition, Tom considered, to last them through a month's brisk fighting.

Having brought them into something like order, he next set about the equipment of an equal force of pikemen. He had read something of the good service done by pikemen in the wars of the seventeenth century, and he was indeed amazed to find how details that had lain unnoticed in his mind now came crowding to his recollection. He got his men to cut strong staffs, sixteen feet long, from the forest trees, and to each he fixed, by means of a thin plate of iron four feet long, a lozenge-shaped pike-head, made by the Bairo smiths under his direction. Thus the head could not be accidentally broken off, or cut off by the Arabs' scimitars. The men so armed he trained to act with the musketeers. In close fighting order the musketeers were drawn up in two ranks, the front rank kneeling, the rear rank standing, while the pikemen stood behind, their pikes projecting in front of the musketeers. In charging, the pikemen led the way, supported by the musketeers with bayonets or clubbed muskets.

Tom was, of course, entirely in the dark as to where the expected engagement was to be fought--whether in the forest, in the open outside the village, or again behind the stockade; but he was determined to be prepared for any contingency. Ill-armed as his force was, he recognized that he might have to fight a defensive campaign for a time, trusting to wear the enemy out, and to seize a favourable opportunity for taking the offensive. It was a risky policy with a negro force; he could place full reliance only on the pikemen and musketeers; the great body of the allies was little better than a rabble, and man for man less dependable, because less used to regular fighting, than the Arab auxiliaries. But he hoped that his special troops would be sufficiently well drilled to give a good account of themselves if fighting took place in the open, while in the forest the others could certainly harass the enemy, probably cut off his supplies, ambush him, and attack

him at a disadvantage.

All this time Tom had been gleaning various items of information as to the routes by which the enemy might be expected to come. There was, of course, the path through the forest, along which he himself had been carried to the village, but he learnt that there were two other possible ways, to the west and east of the direct route. These, however, would involve the crossing of at least two broad rivers, and the rainy season being barely over, the streams would be so swollen as to render fording impossible.

He would gladly have fortified the approaches to the village had this been possible, but after carefully weighing the pros and cons he reluctantly decided that he must be content to extemporize stockades when the approach of the Arabs was announced. Until the peril was imminent he could not count upon sufficient assistance from his allies to enable him to construct defensive works on all the paths by which the expected invasion might be made, and his own troops were clearly insufficient for the purpose.

The long-awaited signal came at length. On the night of November 28, a date which Tom carefully marked in the pocket-diary he had obtained from Herr Schwab, the faint taps of a drum were heard far away to the north. A few minutes later a distinct roll came from the nearest post. At distances of six and three miles the signal drummers had passed on the message received by them from posts farther afield. Reading the message by the prearranged code, Tom made out that a small force had been sighted sixty miles from the village. Surmising that this was merely the advance-guard, he calculated that the main body would take at least five or six days to arrive, and he resolved to wait until the morning before calling up his levies.

Soon after daybreak a courier came panting into the village, and announced that the line of runners had transmitted to him the news that a huge force of Arabs was advancing along the forest-path a mile or two in the rear of the advance-guard.

The village drummers were at once called on to signal the news to the allied chiefs, and runners were despatched to them all confirming the intelligence. The chiefs were each to send their women and children into Mwonga under a small escort, with not less than six weeks' supply of food. The warriors who were used to forest fighting were to muster at the edge of the forest, and await orders from Kuboko. The remainder, men of the plain, with no special skill in woodcraft, and dreading the forest as an unknown region of unimaginable terrors, were to concentrate to the north-east of the village, and hold themselves in readiness to move in any direction at a moment's notice. By making forced marches, all the fighting-men of the allies had arrived at their appointed places by the morning of the next day. It was a glorious morning, and, looking round from the village on the eager

host, their spear-heads glittering in the sunlight, Tom drew good augury, and felt his heart leap within him.

His force numbered four thousand one hundred all told, and as yet he was wholly without definite information of the size of the Arab army. It was important that every possible means should be taken of worrying and reducing the enemy while marching through the forest, encumbered, as no doubt they were, with carriers and baggage. They included, Tom felt sure, a very large number of men armed with rifles and muskets, but their superiority in this respect would be to a great extent neutralized among the trees. His first care, therefore, was to despatch five hundred of his best forest-fighters, divided into twenty bands of twenty-five each, into the forest, to dig pits, plant stakes, and employ every device known to them to delay and harass the advance. They were not to penetrate into the forest for more than thirty miles from their base, in order that they might be easily supplied with food, and readily recalled if need arose.

Tom's next step was to arrange with the katikiro for the defence of the village against a possible flanking attack. He could not be sure that the line of the advance now signalled would be the line of the real attack; for all he knew, the Arabs might divide their force, advance in two directions, and, while making a feint in their immediate front, throw all their strength upon the village, hoping to take it unawares. The katikiro during the last few weeks had proved himself one of the most intelligent and persevering of all Tom's lieutenants, and Tom had complete confidence that his courage and determination would not fail at the critical moment. To him, therefore, he entrusted the defence of the village. He gave him a thousand of the plainsmen, of whom sixty were armed with muskets, and also the whole of the cadet corps, who, being young and hot-headed, he thought would be all the better for the restraint of the stockade. The force was, he knew, quite inadequate to hold the extensive line of fortifications if the place was seriously assaulted; but it could, he hoped, hold its own behind the stockade for a day or two, allowing time for Tom himself to return to its assistance.

Before leaving the village, Tom took the katikiro aside to give him final instructions. Msala was talking to the medicine-man at the time, and the latter scarcely attempted to conceal a malignant scowl as Tom approached. He moved reluctantly away, evidently curious to learn what Tom's business with the katikiro was.

"Msala," said Tom, as soon as he judged Mabruki to be out of ear-shot, "I have given you an important post, because I know that you are fearless, and because I trust you. The village, and the lives of the thousands of people in it, are in your hands. You must on no account leave your post unless you receive a direct order from me. If I want you to leave it, I shall send a messenger to you, and he will bring with him, as a proof that his message is genuine, a leaf out of my pocket-

book with this mark upon it." He drew a circle, with two diameters intersecting at right-angles. "You see that? Whatever messenger comes to you from me will have a leaf like that, and I will leave this with you, so that no possible mistake can be made. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Msala, his face aglow with the importance of his duties; "I will obey the words of Kuboko, and he shall find that I am as bold as a lion and as wise as an elephant."

"Very well then. Now I myself am going into the forest with my picked men. You may not see me for many days; but do not get down-hearted. Let us hope that when you and I meet again we shall have made our account with the enemy."

CHAPTER XVII

Treachery

Fording a Stream--Preparing a Trap--Ensnared--A Panic--Mystery--Prompt Measures--Scouting--The Arab Camp--A Burly Pikeman--Preparing to Spring--De Castro Escapes

The force made a brave show as it marched out next morning amid the cheers of the thousands of men, women, and children left behind. The katikiro stood at the north gate, proud of his office, and yet envious of the men who were advancing to meet the enemy. At one side of him stood Mwonga, at the other Mabruki the medicine-man, who had recovered something of his old authority with the influx into the village of a vast horde who had not witnessed his discomfiture by Kuboko. Some, indeed, of the Bahima had pleaded that Mabruki might be allowed to accompany them, so that they might benefit by what magical power was still left to him; but Tom had resolutely refused their request, asking them bluntly whether they had not more confidence in his strong arm than in Mabruki's basket and bell. And therefore the only face that scowled on the departing army was Mabruki's.

The van was led by the two hundred and fifty pikemen, their pike-heads polished to a silvery brilliance and flashing in the sunlight. They were followed by the musketeers, with Tom and Mbutu at their head. Then came a select band of fifty, who were to be entrusted with the throwing of the hand-grenades, and with them were a number of Bairo, laden with ammunition. Behind these came the remainder of the force--spearmen and archers, all eager, confident, burning to

meet the foe; and carriers with food and cooking-utensils.

A vast rumour filled the air as the force passed on, the men chattering and laughing, some of them chanting the war-songs of their tribes, others inventing songs on the spur of the moment and repeating the words to the thousandth time to the same weird music. These songs for the most part sounded the praises of Kuboko. "Kuboko is stronger than many lions," sang the men of the plains, who knew what the strength of lions was. "Kuboko is mightier than the horn of a bull," sang the Bahima, prizing their cattle above all things. "Kuboko, the maker of fire, who poureth out the water-spout!" sang the Bairo, whose imagination had been seized by Tom's deeds during the siege. Tom was not puffed up by their ingenuous laudation. He was, rather, touched by their simple confidence, and more than ever resolute to use what power he had, whatever opportunity Providence threw in his way, for their ultimate advantage.

Between the village and the edge of the forest lay a stretch of about fifteen miles of fairly open country, dotted here and there with clumps of bush and with shade trees.

On the way the force overtook a party of pioneers, sent out by Tom in advance, armed with spades, mattocks, knives, and similar implements for cutting away the brushwood, erecting stockades, and performing the other operations necessary in the forest. At every third mile Tom ordered his men to erect a rough redoubt or block-house of earth and wood, by means of which communication might be maintained with the village if it should be invested. At each of these he left a small garrison with arms and provisions. The last redoubt before entering the forest was of larger size than the rest, and in it he left a larger garrison and a more plentiful store of food and ammunition. There was, he judged, ample time for this work of construction, for the African native is extremely quick; and, besides, the Arabs could scarcely reach the outskirts of the forest within four days at their best speed, and that period might be almost indefinitely extended if the warriors already despatched to harass them carried out their instructions thoroughly. Tom saw that, having to deal with an army no doubt immensely superior in point of numbers as well as of armament to his own, he could only impede their march; he could not hope to stop it. A general engagement could hardly be risked. It might easily result in the total destruction of his force and the subsequent storming of the village. It was his object, therefore, to fight a series of small engagements while the enemy were still in the forest, and he hoped, by carefully choosing the moment, to win such success as should give his men new confidence in themselves, each other, and him.

Entering the forest at length, he was soon met by messengers sent back by the leaders of his skirmishers, with the information that the Arabs were advancing in great force behind a screen of native levies, who were thoroughly skilled in

forest-fighting. All that the chiefs had been able to do was to maintain a running fight, laying simple ambushes, darting in spears and arrows whenever they saw an opportunity, and retiring as soon as the head of the main force appeared.

From the description given by the native couriers, who reached him almost every hour from the front, Tom, making due allowance for exaggeration, concluded that the hostile force numbered in all some five thousand men, with an almost equal number of carriers. They were marching in a column nearly five miles in length, the narrowness of the forest track rendering it almost impossible to proceed except in single file.

On the second day, Tom, marching now at the head of his troops, came to a broad stream, which, as he had learnt already from his scouts, was in full flood from the recent rains. He was hardly prepared to find it so broad and deep as it was, and though it could easily be swum, it was necessary to find a ford if the food and ammunition were to be got across in safety. The bank was steep, and covered with rank bush growing as high as a man. "Better try myself; it will be quickest in the long run," he said to himself, and, sliding down the slippery bank, he waded into the water. It was icy cold, and as he walked towards the middle of the stream, and the water rose as high as his chest, he gasped for breath. The current was fairly strong; he could scarcely keep his feet; and at last he found it impossible to do so. But only a few yards to the right he noticed that the water was swirling and foaming, and, swimming to that point, his feet, as he expected, touched bottom on some rocks. There he waded across, clambered up the bank, and ordered his men on the other side to cut a new path down the shelving bank opposite the ford he had so opportunely discovered. There the whole force crossed, the water reaching a little above their knees, and Tom, having seen the passage safely completed, and now shivering with cold, was glad to swallow a dose of the quinine included with a few indispensables in Mbutu's bundle.

Tom had a certain advantage in the mobility of his force. Never more than a day's march from a food-supply, he was able to dispense with the greater part of his carriers; for his troops were able to take with them sufficient for their immediate needs. Retaining only one thousand carriers to bring up supplies from the large redoubt, he employed the rest in assisting the troops to fell trees and build abattis at various defensible points along the route.

He found, however, that after deducting the troops left behind in the village, and the garrisons of the redoubts, he had scarcely more than two thousand five hundred men to meet the Arab advance. The question was, how to dispose of this force to the best advantage. Learning from the couriers at the end of the third day's march that he had come within ten miles of the head of the Arab army, he halted at a particularly dense part of the forest, and proceeded, at a distance of some fifty yards from the track, to cut a path a mile and a half long parallel

to it. Darkness was falling, the Arabs would certainly halt for the night, and by employing all his men he hoped to complete the clearing of the new road by the morning. At the same time he built a stockade of trees masked with shrubs at the southern end of the main track. His plan was to arrest the enemy by the stockade, which was so artfully located at a slight bend in the path that it could not be seen until they were within a yard of it, and then to attack them in flank from the bush. By cutting the parallel road he had made it possible for his men to move up and down at will over a length of a mile and a half, and to choose the best positions for pouring in their fire upon the surprised and congested enemy. The task was completed long before dawn, and there was time for the whole force to snatch a little much-needed sleep before the hard work that might be expected on the following day.

A year before, Tom would have found it difficult, almost impossible, to realize what forest fighting meant. Here he was in an immense forest, stocked with trees from one hundred to two hundred feet high, their dense foliage interlocked overhead, the gaps between them filled with an undergrowth of matted bush, rubber shrubs, creepers, and dwarf-palms, so thick that the eye could never penetrate more than twenty yards at the farthest. The path was a mere foot-track, along which it was only possible to march in single file. At some points, where the soil was soft, the path had in the course of generations been worn down to a lower level, and seemed like a railway cutting between high banks of dead leaves and debris. At other points it wound round a fallen tree, no one having taken the trouble to remove the obstruction. Here and there, too, great festoons of monkey-ropes, mingled with orchid blossoms, hung from tree to tree across the track, so thick that progress was impossible until they had been lopped down with knives and axes.

Tom, as he lay on the bank to rest, felt the oppression of the confined space even more than he had felt it during his previous wandering through the forest. The recent rains had caused a rank smell to rise from the decaying vegetable matter all around him, and he would not allow himself to think of the ever-present dangers of malaria. The night was cold. Not wishing the enemy to discover his position or the positions of his men, he had given orders that no fires were to be lighted, and, but for the cloth which Mbutu had brought by his instructions, he would have shivered all night long, and in all probability been prostrated with racking pains in the limbs. As it was, he rose from his brief sleep cold and hungry, but feeling ready for anything, and indeed anxious to meet the long-looked-for enemy at last. After a breakfast of bananas and potato-bread, he sent messengers forward to instruct the skirmishers and scouts to fall back. He thought that if the harassing attacks ceased for a whole day, the Arabs might conclude that their enemy had become disheartened, and might thereby be tempted to relax their

vigilance.

At the farther end of the newly-made parallel track there was a large tree, which, dominating the intervening space and overlooking the main path, provided a convenient refuge from which it was possible to obtain a good idea of the strength and composition of the enemy's force as it came in sight. Tom found that he could easily climb the tree to such a height that, while secure from observation himself, he could act as his own intelligence officer and not have to trust to the magnifying eyes of his men. If the Arabs were ten miles away the day before, he concluded that it would probably take them the whole day to reach this point, the forest being dense, and the path obstructed in many places by the encroaching bush. He knew that his men would not be very willing to fight during the night, and there seemed every likelihood that the action would not begin until the next day. It turned out according to his expectation. The Arabs, after the harassing movements of their enemy on the previous days, had evidently resolved to take advantage of the lull to enjoy a thorough rest, for the whole day went by without a sign of them. Tom again camped with his men for the night, placing sentries for several hundred yards along the path to prevent anything in the nature of a surprise.

He was up with the dawn again, and sent forward a few scouts to reconnoitre. These returned by and by, and reported that the enemy had marched forward only three miles the previous day, and were now about seven miles away. Being anxious that they should be surprised as completely as possible, Tom refrained from sending forward many scouts, lest some incautious action should give the Arabs warning. In the afternoon, judging that the force must be drawing near, he placed some seventeen hundred men along the parallel road, and eight hundred behind the stockade, ordering the musketeers among the latter not to fire until they were actually attacked, or until they heard firing in their front.

About three o'clock he sent forward two Bairo to ascertain the distance of the enemy, and climbed into his crow's-nest in the tree. Suddenly, in the silence of the forest, a shot rang out. "One of my scouts hit, I'm afraid," said Tom to himself. The waiting warriors stood in an attitude of tense expectancy, every man gripping his weapon, and leaning forward in readiness to move in whatever direction he was ordered. Half an hour passed, and then one of the scouts came swiftly down the path, emerging as it were from a curtain of green. Tom, looking at him, saw fear in his face. His eyes were standing out of his head, his features twitching as though pulled by some unseen string; he was shaking like an aspen. "This won't do," thought Tom; "that fellow will scare the rest." He slipped down the tree, and met the man before he had been seen by any of his comrades. Laying a firm hand on his shoulder, he bade him tell his news. The man collapsed in a limp knot on the ground, and with many a spluttering stumble explained that as he and his

mate were creeping along in the bush beside the path, a shot had come from who knows where, and his companion had fallen dead beside him.

"How far ahead was this?"

"Master, how should I know when fear came rustling behind me? I ran, master; my feet carried me as on the wind."

"Where are the enemy?"

"In the bush, master, tens upon tens of them. But I saw none of them; no, I saw nothing but the smoke of the fire-stick in the forest. I am very sick, master, and my old father lies sick at home. Will the master let me go and nurse him?"

Tom sternly bade the man climb the tree before him and hide in the foliage. "Good heavens!" he thought, "if they all turn out like this coward!" But he refused to harbour such a thought, remembering their conduct during the siege. He climbed the tree after the man, waited some twenty minutes, and then saw, fifty yards away among the trees, the head of the Arab column coming slowly along the path. The way was led by half a dozen stalwart Arabs armed with rifles, walking warily, looking right and left for signs of the enemy. They passed, and were followed by fifty Manyema armed with rifles and axes; beyond these he could not see. They came cautiously along; they passed down the main path, silently, watchfully, but without throwing out skirmishers. There was a gap of two hundred yards, and then came the main column of Manyema, armed for the most part with spears. They were marching close behind one another, and Tom's plan was to allow them to occupy the mile and a half on the main track between his tree and the stockade, and then to fall upon them while crowded into this narrow tunnel through the forest. He counted fourteen hundred of the Manyema; there was another gap; then, just as the head of the force of turbaned Arabs was emerging into view, armed with rifles and pistols of various make, a shot from the direction of the stockade announced that the obstacle had been discovered. Dropping from his perch, Tom gave the long-awaited signal to his men waiting in ambush, and an irregular fire broke out down the line of men scattered under cover along the parallel track. The musketeers numbered only about two hundred in all, but Tom reckoned on the surprise counting for a good deal, and the puffs of smoke leaping out from the brushwood at various points, with the clash of explosions, and the demoralizing effect of the hand-grenades, impressed the startled Arabs with the idea that a much larger force than their own was opposed to them.

The surprise was complete. Met by a musket-fire and a discharge of spears and arrows from behind the stockade, the Manyema could not advance; on their left flank there was evidently a well-armed force in ambush; on their right was thick forest, in which they could only find shelter by cutting a way. They halted irresolutely, seeking cover wherever they could. Slugs whizzed through the air and slapped against the trees; the firing of bullets was heard as the rifle-armed

Manyema fired erratically at their invisible enemy. But after the first shock they pulled themselves together, and soon realized that they possessed better weapons than their adversaries. They began to move forward again towards the stockade, and Tom, passing down the line, saw that it was time to strike home. Ordering his men on the path to stand firm, he hurried to the stockade, upon which the Manyema had not as yet ventured to make a serious attack. He instructed a party of the musketeers to keep up a steady fire so long as there was no danger of hitting their friends; then, placing himself at the head of the remainder, he led them round the left of the position, and, forcing his way through the thinnest part of the scrub, with a cheer charged down upon the Arab column. The Bahima followed him, raising their sonorous battle-cry. This was too much for the already demoralized enemy. Finding themselves attacked both in their front and on their flanks, the Manyema lost heart, and, turning their backs, began to push along the path in full retreat.

This was a signal to the force on the parallel path to re-double their fire; slugs, grenades, spears, and arrows, fell thick and fast; the Manyema quickened their pace, and, with no thought now of attempting to defend themselves, crowded and jostled one another in their eagerness to flee. Back they ran, higgledy-piggledy, into the Arabs, who were hastening in the other direction to join in the fray, ignorant of what had been going on. The two columns thus meeting brought each other to a halt; but the Manyema behind, goaded now to frenzy, pushed on regardless of their comrades, until soon there was a struggling heap obstructing the narrow path. The panic was communicated to the Arabs, who, after firing a few wild shots, some of which found billets in their own men, turned about and led the flight. Now the Bahima, with savage yells, came pouring out of the forest on to the main path. Every yell had a note of triumph, a tone almost of reckless gaiety, as the men pierced and hacked among the panic-stricken foe. The enemy had by this time fairly taken to their heels, bolting along the narrow track like scared rabbits, impeding each other's movements, trampling dead and wounded ruthlessly underfoot. On and on pressed the Bahima, springing across fallen bodies, heedless of their own wounds, carrying the pursuit for miles, until they found themselves checked by a reserve of Arabs strongly posted in a clearing which had been chosen as the camping-place for their baggage and carriers. Tom, who was foremost among his men, now ordered the recall. Some of his more headstrong warriors did not hear or neglected to obey the signal, and fell victims to their own recklessness.

Hurrying back to the stockade, Tom left five hundred men there to dispute the Arab advance, with orders to hold the position as long as possible, but to retire if they were hard pressed. It was now dusk. No further attack was likely until the dawn, and Tom decided to retire five miles along the path to a position he had

previously noted as offering great advantages for defence. It was the river he had crossed during his second day's march. Apparently this was fordable only at the one spot, and the steep shelving bank, itself strongly in favour of defenders posted at the top, could be made doubly formidable by means of a stockade. After fording the river on the rocks, the enemy would have to clamber diagonally up the bank by the path Tom's men had cut, as the undergrowth was too thick to allow of an easier path being made under a determined fire. The bank, muddy and slippery at any time of flood, had been rendered doubly difficult by the recent passage of so many men. A few feet beyond its top, therefore, on the level ground, Tom set his men to build a strong stockade across the path, with a total length of some thirty feet, and curved inwards at each end in order to permit of a flanking fire. The large number of active men employed soon felled enough trees for the purpose; they were split into lengths of about six feet, and planted in the ground close to one another, with transverse logs lashed to them with rough rope, and every interstice filled up with earth and rubbish. It was so placed that a defending force could dominate the whole width of the river, and Tom felt pretty sure that one man within the stockade was fully equal to half a dozen without. The advantage of the position was still further increased by the fact that it was out of sight from the opposite bank, for Tom was careful to leave the intervening scrub untouched, so that it formed an opaque screen.

The stockade having been completed in a thoroughly workmanlike manner by the afternoon of the next day, Tom sent orders to the men he had left farther in the forest to retire as rapidly as possible upon this new defensive position, where he intended to make a serious stand. There was always the chance that the Arabs, finding the direct road blocked, would attempt to get through by cutting another path, but Tom hoped that any such move would not escape observation, and that the time consumed in cutting the new path would enable him to fall back and prepare for meeting the attack elsewhere.

His calculations were rudely disturbed. A few hours after his messengers left he received astonishing news from his base. He was sitting by the stockade, enjoying a well-earned rest and a meal, when a Muhima came panting up from the direction of the village, and threw himself on the ground with respectful greeting. Rising at Tom's order, he reported that he had a message from the katikiro; that he had run until his heart was jumping in his throat and his legs were like running water. What was the message? Oh! it was that the katikiro was sending eight hundred men to the burning mountain, as Kuboko had ordered, to remain there until Kuboko came to them. He would do anything that Kuboko bade him, especially as he had Kuboko's mark; but he entreated Kuboko to remember that his force, bereft of eight hundred men, was now so weak that he could not keep an enemy out of the village. The eight hundred would start in three cookings af-

ter the messenger left, and the katikiro hoped that Kuboko would be pleased with him.

Tom was thunderstruck. Eight hundred men to the burning mountain, to start in three hours! What could it mean? There was a terrible mistake somewhere, but how could Msala have made such a mistake after the clear instructions given him? He was not to move a man from the village unless he received a direct order, accompanied by a leaf from the notebook, with a pencilled diagram that was to be the indispensable guarantee of the genuineness of the message. No such order had been sent. Tom cudgelled his brains vainly for an explanation. The message could not have originated with his own force, for if any of his lieutenants had taken fright he would have asked for reinforcements and not sent the eight hundred to the volcano, twenty miles on the other side of the village. Could an enemy be approaching in that direction? But the katikiro's messenger had distinctly said that the order had been received from Kuboko. Tom puzzled and puzzled, canvassing every possible solution of the mystery. The thought suddenly flashed into his mind: Could there be foul play somewhere? Was it no mistake of the katikiro's, but a deliberate plot to denude the village of its garrison, and hand it over to the enemy? Surely a flanking movement could not already have been effected without his knowing it? Good heavens! was the smiling Msala a villain? It was difficult to think so, for he had been Tom's strongest and most faithful helper. The suspicion was dismissed at once. Then he must be the victim of a ruse. That was just as difficult to understand. The man had spoken of Kuboko's mark. The katikiro must, then, have received a paper with the diagram drawn upon it. No one else, so far as Tom knew, had seen the mark. Had Msala lost the paper given him? Had someone discovered the meaning of it and used it for a treacherous end? There could hardly be a second leaf, for the only paper among them all was contained in Tom's pocket-book. Stay! He took out his pocket-book and turned over the leaves. It struck him that someone might have tampered with it. It was to all appearance intact. He ran over the leaves rapidly in the opposite direction. There should be a loose leaf corresponding to that which had been torn out to give Msala. Where was that? He searched for it with growing uneasiness; held the book by its back and shook it violently. No loose leaf fell; it was gone! The book shut with a clasp, so that it was impossible that the odd leaf had fallen out of itself. It must have been abstracted. Someone had played him false!

With Tom thought and action went together.

"Who brought the message to the katikiro before you started?" he asked.

"Mkinga," said the man. "Mkinga came first. He came to the village and spoke to the katikiro; he talked a long time, and gave the katikiro a piece of white rag. I was by, for I am the katikiro's servant, and I saw, and I know that I speak the truth. Yes, he talked to the katikiro, and the katikiro held out the white rag

and frowned, and asked Mkinga where Kuboko was, and all that had happened, and Mkinga told him, and the katikiro said: 'It is well,' and bade Mkinga go back to Kuboko and say that his servant the katikiro would obey his lord's bidding, and knew his lord's mark on the white rag."

"Mkinga!" exclaimed Tom. "Was there a man named Mkinga among our troops, Mbutu?"

"Yes, sah. Mkinga lazy man, sah; no work, no do nuffin; grumble, grumble all time, sah."

"Where is he now then?"

"Said him sick, sah; him no fight; no, no; him go home and nurse pickin."

"Ah! And what was he in the village? I don't remember the man."

"Him fink him medicine-man, sah; go pick grass for Mabruki; make Mabruki him medicine; oh yes! I know dat."

"Was the medicine-man near when Mkinga arrived in the village?" asked Tom of the messenger.

"Oh yes! The katikiro talked to the medicine-man, and showed him another bit of white rag like the bit Mkinga brought, and after they talked Mkinga was sent back."

"You say the man disappeared, Mbutu. Has he been seen since?"

"No, sah."

"Ah! That will do, my man; go and get food. Mabruki is at some mischief, Mbutu," he added. "There's a plot to betray the village. Get together a hundred and fifty of the best pikemen and a hundred and fifty musketeers, also two hundred spearmen; all strong active men, men who have had a good meal and can be trusted. Tell them that in the time it takes to cook a pot they will start for the village with me. You understand?"

"Yes, sah;" and Mbutu went away to fulfil his errand.

Tom's mind had been made up instantly. The village was evidently to be betrayed from within, and in all probability there was an enemy now outside the gates. The only chance of saving it was to return himself with all speed, and take the enemy unawares. He could not stop to consider who he could be, or how he could have so strangely outflanked him; the only question was whether in any case it was possible to reach the village in time. It was thirty miles away, and fifteen of these were in the forest, where marching must necessarily be slow. But the attempt must be made; he must reach the village at all costs as early next day as possible, and could only hope that the enemy would not have actually entered the place, or that the katikiro, discovering the treachery, would be able, in spite of his diminished force, to hold his own until reinforcements arrived.

Within an hour Mbutu had the force of five hundred picked men in readiness to set out. Their success against the Arabs had so inspirited them that they

were exulting in the prospect of another victory under the leadership of the great Kuboko. Mbutu, using his own judgment, had told them nothing of the long night's march before them, so that they might start in the same spirit of confidence and enthusiasm. It was dark, but the moon was rising, and by its light filtering through the tree-tops Tom quickly scanned the force, and was pleased to see how eager and how fit they were. Then he sent for the principal chief among the men who were to be left behind.

"My brother," he said, "I am going to leave you for a time. There is nothing to fear; a small force of Arabs is showing itself insolently outside the gates of Mwonga, and I go to scatter it to the winds. Now I leave you here in command. I trust you. You are to hold this stockade. If the enemy appear, you know what to do. Let them get to the very edge of the river, yes, even into the river itself, and then fire at them, launch your spears at them, and prevent them from reaching this bank. Keep well behind the stockade and they will not see you, so that you will be able to do much damage among them, while they are powerless to hurt you. The post is a strong one; you must hold it at all costs. You must have confidence in me, as I have in you. You have seen what we have been able to do already; though I am not here, fight as though you saw my face and heard my voice, and all will be well. If you find that the enemy is too strong to be withstood, defend the stockade as long as possible, and then retire, but slowly, and fighting all the way."

The chief replied that he would obey his lord Kuboko in all things, and fight like an elephant at bay. Tom then impressed on the minor chiefs that they must give willing support to the head. Their loyalty to himself had already enabled them to strike a severe blow at the enemy, and from this they should learn the value of union against the invader. He reminded them how one spear was easily broken, while a bundle resisted all efforts; and with a final exhortation to act as became brave and loyal men he started with Mbutu and his troops. He looked at his watch; it was just midnight.

That march lived long in Tom's memory. Around him was the vast darkness, occasionally broken by the wan moonlight piercing the roof of foliage. The air was damp and chill, permeated by the sickly odour of decay. Tom walked at the head of his men with one of the best of his scouts, pressing on until he felt as though he were in a dream, his movements mechanical, requiring no effort, his feet seeming to find their way over obstacles without any volition of his, his mind busy all the time with other things. The pace was slow, for the path could rarely be seen, hemmed in by giant trees, underwood, and thorn. On and on the men tramped in silence, their bare feet making a curious swishing sound on the sodden mould. There were narrow streams to be forded, switchback hills to mount and descend; in some parts the path was slippery, and every step forward seemed to be

followed by a longer slip back. Still he tramped on doggedly, his heart beating like a hammer against his ribs, the men panting aloud, uttering a sharp exclamation sometimes when they struck their bare feet against the knotted roots of a tree, or dodged a thorn too late to prevent their faces from being scratched and torn. On and on, with never a pause, till at nine in the morning the band reached the edge of the forest, and saw the wide scrub-dotted plain stretching in front of them.

For just five minutes Tom allowed the men to lie flat on the ground to rest; then up again. They were terribly fagged; the fighting and marching of the previous days, followed by the building of the stockade, had told on them all. But there was no time to spare for a protracted rest. Only half of the journey was yet accomplished, and the remainder of it must be done at a quicker pace. Walking was easier now that the forest was left behind, but the easiness of the path only incited Tom to quicken the pace, so that a still greater demand was made on the tired negroes. They plodded on doggedly, several falling out dead-beat, the rest following their leader with starting eyes and every muscle of their legs racked with cramp. At each of the block-houses, as the column passed, the Bahima in charge came out to meet Tom and received his instructions for signalling news. There was no halt at any of these places; Tom gave his orders on the march. On and on went the column till at mid-day it arrived at a clump of wood three miles from the village, and there Tom bade them lie down in concealment and rest, while he sent forward Mboda, Mbutu's brother, with a scout to find out what was going on. They were not to go into the village; indeed, they were to keep out of sight from its stockade, for the enemy might even now be in possession of it, and in that case must know nothing of the presence of a relieving force.

At four o'clock Mboda returned with the news that an hour before they had seen a large Arab force halt at a spot about a mile to the west of the village, and make preparations for camping. It had but just arrived, coming from the setting sun. Tired as he was, Tom saw that his best course now was to make a reconnaissance in person and discover for himself what was in the wind.

He had had nearly three hours' rest during the absence of the scouts, but no food except a few bananas, for he would not allow the men to light fires for cooking. Feeling stiff and sore and hungry, he started alone, and made a long circuit round the eastern and southern sides of the village, being careful not to approach too close to it, and ever on the alert to avoid any natives who might be in the neighbourhood. He walked as quickly as he could, so as to come within sight of the Arab encampment before dark. After a tramp of nearly six miles, the last two of which had been a gradual ascent, he found himself, on emerging from a clump of bush, within a mile of the camp, which had been placed very conveniently in a slight hollow. Even at this distance he could see that it was a regular encampment and not a mere halting-place, and he threw himself down

behind a bush, and with his head propped on his arms surveyed the scene.

"There's a plot, that's pretty certain," his thoughts ran. "The question is, are these men outside the village concerned in the plot which sent eight hundred of the garrison on a wild-goose chase to the volcano? If so, their only aim must surely be the capture of the village. Then why don't they attack? It's a big camp; there must be a big crowd of Arabs there, and Msala has only about two hundred fighting-men to defend that enormous circumference. They must know that, if they're in the plot. And there's always the chance that the eight hundred will come back. Perhaps the Arabs are tired out with their day's march, and want time to recuperate. Or are they going to make a night attack? Last time they attacked at dawn, their usual custom. I wonder if they've taken a leaf out of my book, and think that as I routed them at night, they'll turn the tables and storm the village under cover of darkness? One thing is clear: they expect to have to fight, or they'd have marched straight in, and that they haven't is a proof that I was right in believing the katikiro to be loyal. Now, what's my next move? I should dearly like to see a little more closely into their camp; how can I manage it?"

He looked about him. The bush dotting the ground was quite insufficient to hide him continuously from the eyes of a sharp sentry. On the other hand, if he waited until dark he would probably fail to see much, and in any case that course would delay his return to his men, and perhaps make it too late to do anything to frustrate a night attack on the village. Wondering what was to be done, as he moved to the left his eye caught a narrow watercourse zig-zagging down the sloping ground in the direction of the camp. He remembered it well now, though for the moment it had slipped from his memory. The banks were steep, and the water shallow, so that he felt sure he could creep down to within a few hundred yards of the camp without being seen, provided no one came to the brook for water and that no sentries were posted outside. He decided to risk it, trusting to hide, if necessary, at one of the many windings made by the stream. Creeping along, with every care that no splash or rolling stone should betray him, he arrived safely within three hundred yards of the camp, and then, cautiously raising his head, he peered over the bank.

There were only two sentries on this side of the camp. The nearest, some two hundred yards away on the right, was leaning, as if half-asleep, on the stock of his musket; the other, half as far again to the left, had made himself comfortable in the fork of a fallen tree. It was evident that the Arab leader was either extraordinarily self-confident or convinced that he had no opposition to fear.

The whole camp was enclosed by a palisade, which Tom judged, from the portion he saw, to be about a thousand yards in circumference. The palisade consisted of saplings, and was not defended by a trench; but it was at least five feet high, and from his position in the watercourse Tom could see absolutely nothing

inside the fence. There was nothing for it, then, but either to wait till darkness had fallen and then try to creep closer and look over or through the palisade, or to give up the attempt to obtain information and return to his men. He was very reluctant to adopt the second alternative, and decided at any rate to remain where he was until it was dark.

He had not long to wait. It was past four before he left his own camp, and it was now nearly six. After remaining for twenty minutes in his place of concealment, until he began to feel numbed by the cold, he ventured to lift his head above the bank. There was nothing between him and the palisade; a red glow from the camp-fires within was lighting, the sky, and over the fence came the noise of hundreds of gabbling tongues. He crept over the bank, waited an instant, and then ran noiselessly across to the palisade, where a few bushes would afford him some cover if anyone happened to look over. Resting a moment, he heard the guttural sounds of talking and laughing on the other side; the negroes were evidently preoccupied with their own concerns.

When a little time had elapsed he got up and peeped over the palisade, and saw crowds of Manyema eating, drinking, gambling about the camp-fires. Beyond them was another palisade defended by a trench, and within this he guessed that the Arabs of the force were camped. Finding that he could obtain no further information except by venturing among the enemy, which was out of the question, he stole back to the watercourse, made his way up it, then under cover of the darkness cut across the country, passing within a few hundred yards of the village. For a moment he thought of going in at the southern gate and arranging for the co-operation of the katikiro and his force in the movements he contemplated, but on consideration saw that to do so might arouse a commotion in the village and awaken suspicion among the Arabs. Proceeding, therefore, on his way, he saved more than two miles of his former journey, and reached his men about half-past seven. He was then dead-beat, but he had made up his mind what his course of action was to be. Mbutu, he was glad to observe, had not allowed the men to light fires. Giving orders that the men were to continue to rest until half-past eleven, and that unbroken silence must be maintained, he ate ravenously the food provided for him, wrapped himself in the rug Mbutu had carried, and threw himself on the ground to snatch a brief sleep.

Long usage enabled him to wake at any moment. At half-past eleven he rose, and ordered Mbutu to go quietly about among the sleeping men and rouse them. In a few minutes they were all on foot, and, looking at them as they stood, bright-eyed, eager, confident, Tom adopted a well-known saying and declared inwardly that they "were ready to go anywhere and do anything".

"Men," said Tom in their own tongue, "the Arabs are encamped beyond the village there. I am going to lead you to attack them. We shall surprise them if

you walk silently. There must be no talking, no noise of any kind. The musketeers will leave all their ammunition behind; this will be a job for bayonets, spears, and pikes alone."

His plan was to make a wide detour and come upon the enemy from the north-west, the absence of sentries on that side having convinced him that if they were keeping watch at all it was directed towards the village. It was natural that they should take precautions against a direct sortie without looking for an attack from the quarter in which they had themselves come. Leaving fifty carriers, picked up at the block-houses, to take charge of the food and ammunition, Tom started with his men at a quarter to twelve.

It was pitch dark; the sky was evidently clouded, and the air had a nipping rawness that seemed to forebode rain. Tom was rather anxious about the possibility of keeping the proper direction; but his men were all natives of the district, and the man he had appointed as guide marched on with confidence, finding the way apparently rather by instinct than by the sense of sight. Soon a dull glow on their right, the reflection of the village watch-fires, served as a landmark, and in half an hour they were abreast of it, sufficiently near to hear the occasional howl of one of the village curs, or the lowing of one of the cattle. They marched in dead silence. Now and then a pike would catch in some obstruction, such as a bush, a creeper, a branch of a low tree; once or twice the butt of a musket carelessly held struck against an ant-hill or a rock, or a man would trip over a stone and cause a momentary break in the even progress of the column; but not an ejaculation came from the mouths of the men. Tom was proud of the splendid results of the discipline they had undergone, and ready to avouch that under proper training anything could be made of the Bantu negro. On and on they went, the narrow column crawling like a black snake over grass-land, swamp, and almost bare rock. They passed the village, began the ascent to the south of it, skirting the spot where the flourishing banana plantation had once stood, crossed the stream a mile and a half above the village, and then arrived at a point whence they could see the glow from the fires in the Arab camp.

Here Tom halted the men, and quietly told them his plans. The attack was to be made at two points, the north-west and south-west corners of the encampment. Tom himself would lead one body of his men; the other he entrusted to a gigantic negro named Mwonda, who had distinguished himself on many occasions during the siege of the village and in the forest fight. He stood six feet two in height, with extraordinary muscular development and great physical strength. He was absolutely fearless. His besetting sin was a habit of boasting, which, however, was so naïve and inoffensive that his mates were more amused by it than irritated. He was accustomed to assert loudly that he was a pure Muhima, though his features and his whole physical organization proved him to be incontestably

one of the Bairo. But his valour was so pre-eminent that no one was hurt when Tom appointed him captain of the pikemen, and his skill with the weapon was unmatched. His pike was several inches longer, and proportionately thicker, than those of the rank and file, and on this night he also carried, slung round his waist, a scimitar taken from an Arab whom he had killed in single fight in the forest. His men had unlimited confidence in him, and Tom had marked him from the first as the ideal leader when any deed of desperate courage not demanding tactical skill was in question.

Half the force, then, was put under Mwonda's command, and he was to lead the assault from the north-west. It was essential to the thorough success of the plan that the two attacks should be simultaneous, and Tom was for a time greatly exercised as to how the necessary signal could be given when the two bodies were separated by the whole length of the Arab camp. It was important that nothing should be done to give the alarm there, and Tom, to avoid risks, had even left his revolver behind, and carried only a musket. Suddenly he remembered Mbutu's faculty for imitating the cries of animals. Why not make use of that now?

"You can mock the jackal's cry?" he said.

"Oh yes, sah! berrah good jackal."

"Very well."

The cry of the jackal, he thought, would carry farthest, and from its very frequency in those parts would not be likely to arouse special attention. There was just a chance of a real jackal interposing at an unfortunate moment, and thus precipitating matters; but the risk, after all, was slight, and Mwonda would not be likely to make a mistake, knowing from what direction the expected signal should come. This was therefore arranged; Mwonda was ordered to creep as near to the camp as possible, and lead the assault the instant he heard the jackal's cry. In case either of the parties were discovered before the signal was given, the resulting commotion in the Arab camp was itself to be the signal for a charge.

Then the march was resumed. Rain had been for some time falling in a steady drizzle, which increased to a downpour as they crept down the slope. Uncomfortable as it was, Tom welcomed the rain, for it completely drowned the dull sound of tramping feet. The scrub grew a little thicker as the ground descended, and the patter of the rain on the leaves, the soughing of the wind through the branches of the trees dotted here and there, produced a sense of uncanniness. Down they went, the bare feet of the men sometimes slipping on a rock, and Tom himself once narrowly escaping a headlong fall into the watercourse he had descended in the afternoon.

Half a mile from the camp he called a halt. The downpour was as steady as ever. There was no sign of sentries. If any had been posted outside the palisade the probability was that they had taken refuge in a small clump of trees some

three hundred yards to the south. It all favoured the enterprise, for surely no attack would be expected on such a night. The very watch-fires inside the camp were well-nigh extinguished, and the absolute silence indicated that the Arabs and their negroes were sleeping beneath their tents, rude huts, and mats. "Now, Mwonda," said Tom in a low whisper, "that is your way. Lead your men as close to the camp as you can, and wait for the jackal's cry. Then you know what to do."

Mwonda grunted assent. His column filed off, and in the darkness the individual figures could only be dimly recognized at a foot distance by the wisps of light-coloured straw which Tom had ordered them to bind about their left arms to distinguish them from the enemy. Tom hoped that, faint as it was, the glow from the dying camp-fires would make these distinguishing marks of value.

Giving Mwonda's column a few minutes' grace to make the extra circuit towards the north-west, Toms force began to creep silently towards the camp. Slowly, cautiously, nearer and nearer they drew; so cautiously that Tom, leading the way, stumbled over a man huddled half-asleep in a blanket on the lee side of a bush. With a half-cry the man sprang to his feet, but as quick as thought Tom flung out his right fist, and stretched him on the sodden ground. Before he could rise again, or Tom could interfere, two Bahima flung themselves on the body, and only a faint gurgle told that their fatal knives had done their work. Tom felt a pang as he realized that one poor creature had gone to his account; he was not yet case-hardened to the terrible realities of war. But he did not falter; a life taken meant perhaps hundreds of lives saved, and never was war waged in a more righteous cause.

The column was now only four hundred yards from the camp. Yard by yard it crawled along, the squelching of the men's feet on the ground being smothered now by the heavy patter of rain on the palisade and the huts. Suddenly a stifled cry in the distance, far on his left, followed inside the palisade by a sentry's call, told Tom that Mwonda's column had not been so fortunate as his own.

"Now!" said Tom to Mbutu, who had kept close at his side all the way. Instantly the blood-curdling jackal's howl undulated through the drenched air. The men sprang forward, with never a yell or cheer, a quick grunt alone proclaiming their excitement. With a rush they gained the stockade, scrambled up and over, Tom never knew how, and while the startled enemy were still pouring half-dazed out of their shelters, and hurrying up by twos and threes towards the palisade, Tom's men were among them. The Arabs in their long burnouses were distinguishable even in the murk; their dependants formed only a blacker patch. Between the outer and inner stockades there was no real attempt at resistance, the men rushing hither and thither in wild confusion, not knowing which way to turn, many being without arms, others endeavouring in vain to fire muskets with damp powder. The Bahima, now yelling and whooping, ran among them, cutting them

down by scores, and the cries of the wounded were mingled with the exultant shouts of the attackers.

Rushing towards the inner stockade, Tom met with a more determined resistance. The Arabs within that had had time to recover from the first shock, and to seize their arms. They made for the side on which, judging by the clamour, the assault was being made. A few shots were fired, at random, for no aim could be taken; but still the storming-party surged on. The foremost of them fell back from the higher palisade, and Tom himself narrowly escaped a blow from a scimitar which, if it had fallen, would have concluded his career there and then. But Mboda fortunately interposed his pike, which was cut clean in two just above the head. Before the Arab could recover himself a second pikeman had run him through. This gave Tom enough time to secure a foothold on the top of the stockade; the next moment he was over on the inside, laying about him doughtily with his clubbed musket. He was speedily joined by several of his men, who lunged and smote at the mass of Arabs before them. There was the remnant of a large fire still smouldering in the centre of the space. Driven back on to this, the combatants sent a shower of sparks into the air, and a flame shot up from the still unconsumed wood, throwing its light full in the face of Tom's immediate opponent, a pike's distance from him. In the features, distorted with rage, Tom recognized those of his old enemy De Castro. The recognition was mutual. With a snarl of hate the Portuguese flung his heavy pistol full at Tom's head, and, changing his sword from his left to his right hand, followed up the throw with a desperate cut. Tom ducked his head; the pistol struck with a dull crack on the skull of the man behind; with the stock of his musket he parried the cut and sprang forward at his enemy. Other warriors were crowding round, and in the press there was no room to swing the weapon; all that Tom could do was to prod heavily with the barrel. De Castro started back, but he failed to escape the force of the blow altogether; it took him in the midriff and doubled him up like a hinge. The surging movement of the throng carried Tom past and out of reach, and though he wrestled his way through and hunted high and low for the Portuguese, he saw him no more.

Their attention having been taken up by Tom's force, which was the first to reach the stockade, the Arabs had not noticed, until it was too late, that they were also threatened from another quarter. Mwonda and his men, clambering over the palisade at the north-west side, found themselves almost unopposed, and, sweeping away the few Manyema in the interval between the two stockades, fell upon the rear of the Arabs in the inner circle. Mwonda himself, by sheer weight and impetus, bore down everyone who tried to make head against him. Nothing could withstand the impetuosity of the charge. Taken thus between two yelling hordes, the Arabs made no further resistance. They fled for their lives, assisted in their escape by the rain and darkness which had so much contributed

to their downfall. Scrambling pell-mell over the stockade on the eastern side, they rushed madly away, and became aware that the village a mile before them was astir; shouts were coming faintly on the air. Fearing that still another force was approaching to fall upon them, they swung round to the north in twos and threes, a hopelessly broken force; and falling, stumbling, crashing through mud and bush, over the streams, into the swamps, they ran headlong, fear pressing hard at their heels.

"Measure for measure!" said Tom to himself grimly. Many and many a time, he made no doubt, had panic-stricken negroes fled from their oppressors in the same way. It was a turning of the tables. The measure the Arabs had meted was being indeed measured to them again, and Tom rejoiced in the thought that just retribution was at last falling on men by whom human life had been held so cheap.

Within the captured camp the victors were panting, laughing, shouting in their glee. The rain had no power to damp their spirits. Cries of "Kuboko!" rang through the air, and a new war-song was composed on the spot. It was past two o'clock in the morning; the rain was beating down more heavily than ever; and Tom ordered the men to see to the few wounded of his force and to do what they could for their wounded enemies before seeking shelter for themselves. He despatched a messenger at once to the village to give the katikiro information of what had happened, and fifteen minutes after the man had started, the shouts of thousands of voices were distinctly heard, as they raised their song of rejoicing.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Great Fight

Rumaliza takes the Field--Exit Mabruki--Tom checks a Rout--Mbutu Protests--The Great Zariba--Coming to Grips--Beaten Off--The Second Attack--Tom in the Breach--Rumaliza's Last Charge--The Eight Hundred--Nemesis

When morning broke in cold and mist, the scene showed how complete had been the surprise of the camp, and how one-sided the fight. More than two hundred men lay dead and wounded within the two stockades, and Tom's heart bled as he realized how helpless he was to do anything effectual for those whose wounds were serious. His own losses had been very slight; many of the men had nothing but insignificant bruises and cuts to show, only a few had been killed. All the

equipment of the camp, and a large quantity of arms and ammunition, had fallen into his hands, forming a very welcome addition to his resources. He estimated that the captured rifles and muskets would enable him to arm nearly six hundred men.

With the morning light came the katikiro with a hundred of his men. He was wild with delight at the discomfiture of the Arabs' scheme, and furious with rage at the trick played upon him, which, but for Tom's vigilance and energy, would probably have succeeded only too well. Despatching three hundred men in pursuit of the Arab force, with orders to bring back what prisoners they could, Tom led the katikiro aside and questioned him on the extraordinary mistake he had made. Msala said that, on the evening of the day on which Kuboko started for the forest, a messenger had come into the village from an Arab force two marches away demanding its surrender.

"I cut off his head," said Msala simply.

Tom started, but the moment was not opportune for a reprimand.

"What happened then?" he asked.

"Nothing. I posted sentries as you bade me; nothing happened."

"Where was Mabruki?"

"He heard the man's message and saw me cut his head off, and he said he would go into the fields and search for herbs and charms to keep the village safe."

"And you let him go?"

"What could I do, master? Mabruki is a strong man, and the people would have grumbled if I had not let him go on such a good errand."

"Always a moral coward, Msala," said Tom to himself. "Well, what then?"

"He came back at dead of night with his herbs. Next day came the messenger from you, showing me the rag with the mark. I sent him back to you. I did not wish to send him, I thought he was tired, but Mabruki said send him, for he would know the way, and would tell you himself that his errand was fulfilled."

"I sent no messenger; that man never reached me. Go on."

"Then I sent the second message to say how weak I should be without the eight hundred. I did not tell Mabruki, for I thought he would be offended."

"No doubt."

"And then I sent the eight hundred men to the burning mountain, as you bade me. And that is all I know till I saw the Arabs coming from the north and making their camp. I was ready to fight. I sent off another messenger to you; but you came, O Kuboko, and you have smitten them like hares."

"I do not understand it yet. Where is Mabruki now?"

"I left him burning grass in honour of your victory."

"Very well. Go back to the village and keep a watch over him. Don't let him escape."

The katikiro returned, with a very crestfallen look, to the village. Tom then gave orders that the Arab camp should be destroyed after everything of any value had been removed. By and by his three hundred returned in twos and threes, bringing with them prisoners captured on the confines of the forest. From one of these, an Arab, Tom succeeded with some trouble in extracting information about the previous movements of the force to which he belonged. He found that, about a week before the main body of the Arabs had left their stronghold, a smaller force of one thousand picked men had started under the leadership of De Castro, all armed with firearms. Their destination was not known when they set out, but they had approached the village by a circuitous route through the forest, some thirty miles to the west of the route adopted by the main force. Their object was to surprise the village after its defenders had been decoyed away. De Castro had not reckoned on finding any force in the village, believing that its full strength would, by the time he arrived, have been drawn into the forest. What had happened after his messenger failed to return, this prisoner did not know.

Questioning him further, Tom was rewarded with information of the greatest interest and importance. The Arab stronghold lay many marches to the northwest, on an island in the middle of a lake. It was strongly fortified, and so cleverly concealed that no one could suspect from the shore that the island was anything but a wilderness of bush and trees. The forest surrounding the lake was dense, broken here and there by clearings where slaves were kept. The officials of the Congo State had never once made their appearance there. No path led through the forest to the shore. The Arabs reached the lake by a river, their canoes being kept on the island and paddled out and in when required. No white man had ever seen this fortress--stay, one white man was probably there now. On the way towards the village De Castro's force had met a big red-faced man with brown hair all over his face, four eyes, two of them stuck on wires of gold, and a stomach like a tub. They had captured with him several bags containing all sorts of curious and useful things, and four donkeys. He had blustered and stormed, saying many things in a strange tongue, but De Castro had ordered him to be carried in bonds to the fortress, to be kept there until the return of the expedition.

Tom could not help smiling as he thought of Herr Schwab, so full of confidence and cheerful assurance, kept a prisoner in the Arab stronghold.

"And who is your leader?" he asked the man.

It was Rumaliza himself, he replied. He was an old man, much broken since his last great fight with the Belgians, but retaining still all his indomitable spirit. He was actually accompanying the force through the forest; for he seemed persuaded that the final crisis of his life had come, and he wished to superintend the inevitable fight and match his known skill and craft against the white man, who, rumour said, was pitting himself against him. With Rumaliza came his tried lieu-

tenant, Ahmed. Mustapha would probably have come also, but for the failure of his ambush against the British force, which had somewhat shaken the old chief's confidence in him. He had been left in charge of the island fortress. There were not many men left with him, but an expedition which had been sent out several months before to the north was long overdue when De Castro's column started, and Rumaliza would probably leave these men behind to strengthen Mustapha's garrison.

All this acted like wine upon Tom's spirit. Rumaliza himself, the chief whose name was everywhere held in horror as a synonym for cruelty, fraud, cunning, and barbarous valour, was leading his host forth on an enterprise on which he staked all! Tom's imagination was stirred at the prospect of meeting the redoubtable chief, and still more at the news of the mysterious island fortress.

From another prisoner, an Arab of higher rank, he obtained, later in the day, particulars which enabled him to piece together a coherent story of the attempted ruse. De Castro had waited and waited for his messenger to return, fuming at his delay, and vowing to teach him a lesson. At length a Muiro appeared, who explained that the man was dead, but brought an offer from the medicine-man to treat. De Castro had gone forward after dark and met Mabruki. This, Tom conjectured, was the time when the katikiro had supposed him to be gathering herbs. The prisoner had himself accompanied the Portuguese to the rendezvous, ten miles from the village, and had heard the terms of the compact. Mabruki had promised to get rid by a trick of the greater part of the katikiro's force. The Portuguese would find it easy then to enter the village. The katikiro would be cut in pieces, after which the white man was to be inveigled back and handed to De Castro. In return for these services Mabruki was to receive a present of ivory, and to be allowed to make himself chief in Mwonga's stead, thus getting possession (Tom supplied the detail from his own knowledge) of the store of ivory and treasure which lay beneath the chief's hut. It was evident that only the katikiro's after-thought, to send a second messenger into the forest, had foiled the plot.

There were still two points that puzzled Tom. The first was, why had not De Castro gone direct to the village instead of camping within a mile of it, three hours before sunset? The Arab explained that his chief had acted in the teeth of the advice of his lieutenants. They were all for proceeding without delay. It was sheer indolence, so characteristic of the Portuguese, and overweening self-confidence, that had determined De Castro to rest after his march and enjoy his evening meal in peace, deferring the attack until dawn. The other point was: How had the medicine-man got possession of the paper? The Arab knew nothing about this, Msala was equally in the dark, and Tom resolved to question Mabruki himself and probe the plot to the bottom.

Having now a pretty clear idea of the course of events, Tom returned to

the village, where the people were holding high festivities in honour of the great victory. Tom did not check the mirth of the non-combatants, but he gathered the fighting-men together and told them gravely that the hardest fight of all was still before them. A few minutes after his return Msala came to him boiling with rage.

"Mabruki is gone!" he said. "While I was away he gathered his basket and bell and piles of charms and fetish-grass, and went away towards the setting sun. Many men saw him go, but they feared his evil eye and the might of his magic, and none dared to stay him."

"Well, we are rid of a villain, and I am spared the necessity of employing a hangman."

"A hangman!" cried the indignant katikiro. "I would myself have cut off his head, though all his devils plagued me for ever after."

"Msala," said Tom gravely, "that sort of thing will not do. Have I been with you so long, and yet you are ignorant of the true way of justice? You will think better of it when your anger has passed away, my friend."

Msala was silent.

"Now, we have no time to waste," Tom went on. "We have had a little rest, and there is the great fight before us in the forest. We must have the men back from the burning mountain. Mbutu, I will send your brother for them. He will go to the volcano and bring back the eight hundred men there. On reaching the village they must rest for a short time; then, Msala, you will send six hundred of them on with all speed northwards, along with two hundred fresh men. The rest will remain with you to defend the village."

This having been arranged, soon after twelve o'clock Tom led his men out towards the north. He had expected a messenger to come in with news from the force he had left in the forest, and he could not but regard his non-arrival as an indication that the men were at least holding their own. After a march of nearly five hours he reached the largest block-house, which stood two miles from the edge of the forest. He found that, though firing had been heard in the distance, no message had been received from the front, and after his troops had made a rapid meal he hurried on.

He had not gone far before he heard irregular firing ahead. Hastening his pace he soon saw, amid the scrub and thin copses at the extreme edge of the forest, scattered bodies of men approaching in the direction of the block-house. Keen as his eyesight was, he could not distinguish whether the men were friends or foes, but some of his own troops at once exclaimed that they were Bahima. The men he had left in the forest were evidently, then, retreating, but the firing showed that they were retiring slowly, fighting, as he had commanded them, every inch of the way. He at once made dispositions to prevent a rout, and to give his men a strong position to retire upon. Sending out a small body of picked men

to rally the retreating troops, he ordered the seventy spademen he had with him to throw up a rough breastwork behind which the musketeers might take secure aim. The work was only half-completed when loud shouts, with the boom-boom of trade guns and the sharper crack of rifles, showed that the Arabs were pressing hard upon the retreating Bahima. Suddenly a larger body of men emerged in confusion from the dense scrub, followed closely by another body evidently in hot pursuit. The retreat would soon have become a rout, for the Bahima were outflanked and outnumbered, and the Arabs, assured of victory, were pressing hard upon them, with exultant cries, and the manifest determination, as soon as the whole of their force had debouched, to finish the struggle with a crushing charge. But the opportune arrival of the small rallying force sent forward by Tom enabled the retreating troops to draw off in comparatively good order. The reinforcements occupied a small copse on the extreme right of the Arab advance, and from this place of vantage they poured in so harassing a fire that the enemy, taken by surprise and fearing a trap, halted, undecided whether to press forward or retire, in the meantime taking what cover the ground afforded. The few minutes' respite was all that was needed to enable Tom to withdraw his discomfited troops behind the breastwork, and when the Arabs made up their minds to clear the copse they found it deserted. They then showed some disposition to advance against Tom's main position, but, meeting a sharp musketry fire, they changed their minds and prepared to form a camp, from which Tom concluded that they had decided to postpone their attack in force until they had surveyed the ground and taken a rest.

It was now past five o'clock, and little more than half an hour of daylight was left. The Arabs had had a hard day's work. They had found the ford so stoutly defended that a passage at that point was impossible, and they had had to march for some miles before they found another fordable place, and then to cut their way through dense forest, harassed all along by the persistent Bahima. Thus they were much in need of rest. To attack by night, moreover, is foreign to all the Arab's habits and traditions, and Tom recognized thankfully that he had the whole night in which to prepare for the fateful conflict.

Obviously, with a force so largely outnumbered by the enemy, he could not afford to risk a fight in the open. The questions occurred to him: Suppose he took up a strong defensive position, could he tempt the Arabs to attack him directly? was there no danger of their creeping round on his right and overwhelming the village? The first question he easily answered. The Arabs had come purposely to attack him, and all that he had ever seen or heard about them warranted the belief that they would waste no time in tactics, but would come on in a furious onslaught, trusting to sheer weight of numbers to carry them through. The second question gave him more difficulty; but when he remembered that in order to reach

the village without fighting him the Arabs would have to make a detour of nearly twenty miles, through a country already stripped of food and waterless, with the danger of their rear being harassed all the way, he regarded such a movement as very improbable, and decided that the approaching battle would in all likelihood be fought on ground of his own choosing.

He had already marked what seemed to him an ideal spot for such an encounter. Extending for nearly a mile into the plain, there lay, to the west of the path into the forest, an extensive swamp, fringed with thick reeds, and so much swollen by the recent rains that it was bound to present great difficulty to an advancing enemy. He resolved to form during the night a strong zariba, resting one side of it upon this swamp. He ordered his men, therefore, to remove all the ammunition and provisions from the block-house to the edge of the swamp, and to obtain a good supply of water from a stream running across the plain half a mile in his rear, and then to set fire to the block-house, which could not be held if seriously attacked, and yet might prove a source of danger if left as a means of cover for the enemy. Collecting, then, his whole force, he led them to the swamp, and set a large number digging a trench and erecting an earthwork around three sides of a square, each face being about one-fifth of a mile in length. Another body he ordered to collect mimosa-scrub and cactus from the clumps in the neighbourhood, to plant these in the earthwork, and to weave among them all kinds of thorn-plants, so as to make a thick hedge, almost impervious to bullets. It was dark before the task was weir begun, but posting a number of pickets and sentries round his position, to prevent any interference on the part of the enemy, he got some thirty of his men to light the workers with torches, which, being seen extended over a large area, would no doubt also serve to give the Arabs an exaggerated notion of his strength. Soon after the torches were lit, shouts from the Arab camp more than a mile away apprised him that they had noted his movements, and the beating of drums at first suggested that an attack was imminent; but Mbutu explained that the Arab drummers were merely amusing themselves by signalling the terrible deeds that were to be done on the following day, and how the Bahima force was to be scattered to the four winds.

Tom merely smiled, and pressed on the work, allowing his men short spells of rest, until about eleven o'clock, by which time the zariba was complete. He would have liked to protect his position still further, by means of pointed stakes planted all round it, driven deep into the ground, and projecting only four inches above the surface. In the half-light, when he expected the attack to be made, these would be invisible to the enemy. But, walking round in the moonlight among his men, he saw that their work on the entrenchments had told heavily upon those he had brought from the village, while those who had been fighting all day in the forest were obviously incapable of further exertion. It was absolutely essential

that they should regain their strength and freshness for the morrow's combat. He therefore contented himself with protecting only the two exposed corners of the zariba, knowing that these are always the most vulnerable points, and the first to be attacked.

Soon after eleven he turned in himself for a short nap, taking every precaution against surprise by posting pickets and maintaining a regular series of patrols, of which Mwonda was left in charge. At two he was up again, going the round of the sentries, and he ordered Mwonda to get what sleep he could before dawn. He had expected that by this time the eight hundred men from the village would have joined him, but when at three o'clock there was still no sign of them he called Mbutu to him.

"You must go and hurry on the advance of those eight hundred men," he said. "We have tremendous odds against us, and it may make all the difference in the world to have those men. If, when you return, you find us fighting, take them round the swamp and fall on the rear of the enemy. I depend on you, Mbutu."

Tom had spoken in Mbutu's own tongue, and was somewhat surprised to miss the bright eager look with which the boy usually received his commands. Mbutu's face was expressionless, and he made no remark.

"What is it, Mbutu? You are not afraid?"

"I am not afraid. I am never afraid."

"Tell me, then, why you look so strangely solemn?"

Mbutu was silent for a few seconds. Then he said:

"I vowed never to leave you, master, to stay always by your side, to be your right arm. You send me from you; I obey. But if any harm comes to you, if a spear pierces you, or a bullet plunges into your flesh, I shall not be there. It is not well, master."

Tom was touched by the boy's devotion.

"I am proud of you, Mbutu," he said. "It is because I trust you that I give this task to you. Do not fear for me; you will do me the best service by leading the eight hundred faithfully to my support. It is my command, Mbutu."

"I will do as you say, master," said Mbutu, and hastened away.

Tom employed the two hours before dawn in still further strengthening his position. He got his men to throw up a semicircular entrenchment inside the zariba and resting on the swamp, as a protection for his reserve. Near the middle of this was a boulder from which he could survey the whole battlefield. For the safe-keeping of his ammunition and hand-grenades he directed his men to make a number of bullet-proof shelters--holes about a yard deep, dug near the earthwork, roofed with wood, and covered with the earth excavated. These shelters were ample protection except against powerful artillery, which Tom knew that the Arabs did rot possess, and he was no longer in any anxiety lest an unlucky

shot should explode his reserve ammunition.

At one point on each face of the zariba he so arranged the screen of mimosa and cactus that it formed a rough gateway opening outwards, thus allowing, if opportunity should arise, of a rapid sally by the defenders. On the northern and southern faces the gateways were at the extremity resting on the swamp; on the third face the opening was at the south-east corner, clear of the stakes.

While a small force of workers was carrying out these operations, Tom sat down to take a final cool review of the whole situation. His own advantages were: a strong position, ample supplies of food and water, a certain number of disciplined troops, and some novelty of armament in the shape of pikes and hand-grenades. On the other hand, he was weaker in numbers than the Arabs, and was not nearly so well equipped with firearms. They, on their side, had the larger force and the better weapons, but these advantages were to some extent counter-balanced by the defects of their strategical position. They were bound to attack, for their supplies were limited. They could only safely obtain water from a stream five miles in their rear; while in regard to food, the whole region for a hundred miles was so sparsely peopled, and had been so thoroughly scoured during their advance, that it could not now maintain a tithe of their number for a week. To assault the village would be, as he had already decided, to court disaster, and after their previous experience, they must themselves feel that they had very little chance of capturing it with a rush. It was quite possible--indeed, more than probable--that they had already heard of the crushing blow suffered by De Castro. Many of the fugitives from his force had no doubt sought safety in the forest until their friends came in sight, and then had joined them. Tom thought it not unlikely that De Castro himself was in the neighbourhood, and he at any rate would stimulate the Arabs to attack, and seize what opportunity there might be of crushing their enemy at a single blow. Weighing all these points, Tom saw that a task of great difficulty and tremendous import lay before him, but he did not quail; his courage and determination rose to meet the manifest danger, and it was with a feeling of confidence, a consciousness that every faculty was nerved to the encounter, that he quietly, about five o'clock, gave the order for the camp to be aroused.

"Breakfast!" he said, for he well knew the fighting value of a good square meal. The natives were wildly excited, and no amount of discipline would suffice to make them hold their tongues. All the time that the food was being prepared, and throughout the meal, their tongues clacked and chattered with unchecked volubility. Soon responsive sounds came from the Arab camp, and the drummers on both sides started a tempestuous duel of threats and malediction. Tom, however, put a stop to this on his side, and when the meal was finished he collected the men, and in a few quiet and earnest words impressed upon them the gravity

and moment of the impending conflict. Then he ordered them to their posts.

On each of the three exposed sides of the zariba he placed a front rank of musketeers and a rear rank of pikemen, the double line accounting for two thousand seven hundred men. The six hundred trade guns and rifles captured from De Castro's force had been distributed among the allies. These included a fair percentage of hunters who knew how to use firearms, although only one in a hundred was the happy possessor of a flint-lock. At each of the corners of the zariba Tom posted fifty additional pikemen, forming thus a double line. The pikemen were supplied with three hand-grenades apiece. The remainder of the force, consisting of four hundred picked men, was stationed in reserve within the inner entrenchment, ready to be thrown towards any threatened point. This reserve was under the command of Mwonda. Tom himself took up his position on the boulder, whence he looked through the gray dawn towards the Arab camp.

It was a cold morning, and a thin mist lay clammy over the plain, wrapping the scattered bushes and trees in a fleecy garment of white. The scouts whom Tom sent out soon vanished, but a breeze was springing up, and pale streaks of light struggled through the haze. Half an hour went by, a period of anxious expectancy. The noises from the Arab camp were hushed, and Tom's three thousand men stood to their arms, and strained eyes and ears towards the enemy. The mist was rolling towards the swamp, and suddenly, as it were behind it, two of the scouts reappeared, with the news that the enemy was on the move. Soon afterwards shots were heard, the remaining scouts came hastening back, and in the distance, dimly through the wisps of vapour, appeared the Arab host, a compact mass, moving directly and rapidly towards the north-east corner of the zariba. It advanced in dead silence. The zariba was still partially curtained by mist; but the Arabs could not have expected to surprise the camp, for the shots fired by the scouts as they were driven in must have shown that Tom's troops were on the alert. From his post of observation on the boulder Tom saw that behind the main body, which he judged roughly to be about four thousand strong, a smaller body was advancing at an interval of a hundred and fifty yards. A few white burnouses were dotted among the serried mass of Manyema in the van, but the reserve force was Arab throughout.

The light was growing, and the mist hanging over the zariba was gradually rolled by the breeze back on to the swamp. Shouts arose from the foremost ranks of the Manyema as they saw their enemy, who responded with a bellowing roar. On came the hostile host, and Tom marked every foot of their progress, ready at the right moment to give the word to his eager troops. The Manyema would charge, he knew; he made up his mind that the force of their charge must be broken ere they came too near, so that they might have less energy for hand-to-hand fighting. The effective range of his muskets was no more than three hundred

yards, but he had a few Winchesters, captured after the siege and in the rout of De Castro's force. When the enemy was within about a third of a mile of the zariba, Tom ordered twenty picked riflemen to open fire. A sharp volley rang across the plain; several men in the front ranks of the Manyema dropped, and there was an instant reply.

"Down, men!" shouted Tom, immediately after his men had fired. Not a head was visible above the parapet, and the enemy's scattered volley passed harmlessly over the camp. Many of the bullets, indeed, were nearly spent when they struck the earthwork; and Tom concluded that the best-armed among the Arabs were certainly not in the van.

He threw a hasty glance at the Arab reserve, now about half a mile away. It was advancing leisurely to the support of the main force, as though the leader expected the zariba to be carried easily at the first shock of the huge mass. Only two faces of the zariba were threatened, and Tom, seeing that there was no immediate danger of an attack from the south, ordered the musketeers on that face to issue from their gateway and post themselves behind the stakes at the corner, whence they could bring a flanking fire to bear on the dense crowd approaching. At the same time he moved the pikemen-grenadiers on this face to the eastern front, to assist in meeting the expected rush, and ordered part of his reserve to sally out by the north gate, and, lining the edge of the swamp, to threaten the flank of the attack.

Rapidly as these movements were carried out, they were barely completed when the Manyema broke into a run, and with fierce exultant yells surged forward, firing as they came. Their fire was wild and unsteady, while Tom's riflemen, taking careful aim from their position behind the earthwork, did much execution among them. The remainder of the musketeers, stooping behind their shelter, eagerly expected the order to fire, but Tom stood silent and watchful, waiting until the enemy were well within range. Even in that tense moment he felt proud of his men's self-restraint. Then, when the shouting negroes were within two hundred yards of the zariba, the long-awaited order was given. A sheet of flame burst from the two sides of the zariba on which the attack was directed. There were many gaps in the advancing ranks, but so dense was the throng that these were instantly filled up, and the Manyema came on like a swiftly-moving wall. There was no time for Tom's musketeers to reload. At fifty yards he gave the word to his grenadiers, who were stooping, match in hand, their eyes fixed on his face, their limbs strained like springs. At the command, three hundred grenades were hurled into the seething mass, and amid the deafening clatter of the explosions the grenadiers seized their pikes and stood close to stem the advancing torrent. Yelling with fury, the horde swept forward. Standing grim at his post, Tom wondered whether anything could resist the impending shock, and glanced with a

momentary anxiety at his embattled ranks. But there he saw no sign of flinching, nothing but gleaming eyes, and hands clenched firmly about their weapons.

Suddenly the centre of the enemy's line came upon the row of stakes at the north-eastern corner of the zariba, so cunningly planted that in their impetuous rush the Manyema failed wholly to perceive them. The advancing wave broke like surf upon the shore; the onrushing force split into two sections, with a confused heap in the centre, stumbling helplessly over the sharp points, screaming with pain, yet pushed on by their comrades behind, these in their turn to fall upon the stakes. As they struggled there, a heavy fire broke from the musketeers who, pushed out from the southern face, had just taken up their position behind the stakes at their corner. A moment later an answering volley came from the ranks of the reserve thrown out on the north side. Bullets fell thick among the maddened heap. Five hundred yards away the Arab leader recognized that his main body was in imminent danger of rout, and hurried forward a portion of his reserve. But it was too late. His riflemen could not fire without doing more damage among their own friends than among the Bahima. Before they had covered half the distance separating them from the zariba, the vanguard was in full flight, rushing pell-mell from the withering rifle-fire, bursting into the ranks of the reserve, and sweeping them away in their mad dash for safety. Fierce yells followed them; the musketeers behind the earthwork had had time to reload, and, leaping up, poured a volley into the retreating ranks. Some of the pikemen were preparing to fling themselves over the fence in pursuit, but a curt word from Kuboko fixed them to their posts. Tom saw, a quarter of a mile away, some fifteen hundred well-armed men, the flower of the Arab force, and recognized that before he could get his own troops clear of the zariba the broken ranks of his enemy might re-form and return with the supporting force to outflank and crush the Bahima, by superior numbers, to say nothing of superior armament, which in the open would tell much more in the enemy's favour. He therefore checked the incipient pursuit, and ordered the troops he had thrown out on each flank to return within the shelter of the zariba.

It had been a breathless moment. Not a quarter of an hour had elapsed since the advancing tide had rolled towards him in the full confidence of victory, and now it had rolled back again, leaving four hundred strewn over the field.

"Well done, my men!" cried Tom, and a great shout rose from his exultant troops. Their loss had been but slight. Tom ordered the wounded to be attended to, and allowed the panting warriors to drink their fill of water.

He was under no illusions upon the situation. The first attack, an impetuous rush *en masse*, had been repelled; but he knew that he was not dealing with mere savages, or even with Arabs of the Soudan, but with experienced warriors who had borne the brunt of many a fight, and who had every motive for nerving them-

selves for a second and more formidable onslaught. It was now broad daylight; the sun lay large and red upon the horizon. In the distance Tom descried the Arab camp occupied only by a horde of slave carriers; between them and him was the baffled enemy, and he saw the Arab leaders slashing at their retreating troops, and adjuring them with vehement cries to rally and stand firm. The conflict was evidently still to come, and Tom was glad of the breathing-space to allow his men to rest, and to enable himself to make preparations for meeting an attack which he knew would strain the powers of his force to the uttermost.

The exertions of the Arab leaders had checked the rout among their men, who were gradually rallying and forming up on either side of the reserve. There was an interval, and then Tom saw emerging from the hostile force three tall figures, two of them wearing turbans and long white robes, the third a gigantic negro, taller even than Mwonda. Tom looked anxiously at the other two as they approached, no doubt to see for themselves the position which had so unexpectedly disconcerted their men. They drew nearer.

"That is Ahmed, I suppose," said Tom to himself. "Who is his companion, I wonder? Can it be the hakim?"

But no; the figure was that of an older and a taller man than the hakim, a venerable figure with long white beard reaching almost to his waist. He was slightly bent, and walked with the tottering steps of an old and feeble man. "Rumaliza!" ejaculated Tom; "it must be Rumaliza himself, the old chief who has deluged Central Africa with blood. He comes breathing out threatening and slaughter. He means to direct the fight; he does me honour."

The three figures still advanced. They were now within musket shot.

"Impudent, not to say foolhardy," thought Tom. "I can't allow them to come any nearer."

He called up half a dozen of his sharp-shooters and bade them open fire. Six bullets sped across the earthwork; next instant Ahmed staggered, and was supported out of range by his companions.

"There's no want of courage, at any rate," thought Tom. "The real business is only just beginning."

When the three intrepid leaders had regained their lines, about a thousand men advanced in skirmishing order towards the zariba, taking advantage of what slight cover was afforded by the inequalities of the ground and the little scrub which Tom's men had not removed. Halting out of range of Tom's muskets, though not of his few Winchesters, they opened a brisk fire on the zariba. A moment's observation sufficed to show Tom that he was outranged; he therefore made no attempt to reply to the fire, but ordered his men to lie close, withdrew them from the north and south faces, where they were exposed to the cross-fire over the earthwork, and set a number of spademen to dig a shelter trench and embankment

parallel to the northern and southern faces of the zariba. Beginning under the eastern face, the men were in great measure protected from the enemy's bullets, and though every now and then a man was hit, the new defences were completed with surprisingly little damage.

[image]

The Zariba and its defences at the moment of the 2nd. Arab attack.

The firing went on more or less fitfully for nearly an hour, and Tom could see that his persistent refusal to reply caused first surprise and then anger among the Arabs. A general movement began on their part. Some fifteen hundred men detached themselves from the main body and marched northwards; a similar body, not quite so numerous, moved to the south; and Tom instantly concluded that a combined attack was to be made simultaneously on each face of the zariba. Taking advantage of some scrub, the northern party was able to advance safely to within two hundred yards of the earthwork, while the southern force in the open halted at a rather greater distance, out of range of all but the Winchesters. Owing to lack of ammunition for these, Tom was unable to touch the enemy, and had perforce to await developments. As soon as the flanking forces had taken up their positions, a compact body of five hundred Arabs advanced to join the skirmishers in his immediate front, and the whole force there, some fifteen hundred men in all, formed up in four ranks over a frontage of about two hundred and fifty yards. Of the whole Arab host only five hundred men remained in the rear, stationed on a knoll selected as their head-quarters during the fight. Among these Rumaliza and Ahmed were conspicuous.

Tom, watching every move of the enemy with lynx-eyed keenness, imperturbably gave his orders. He recognized that it was this time to be a hand-to-hand struggle, with all the odds against him. He divided his reserve into three portions; one, under Mwonda's command, to reinforce any point threatened on the northern face; the second, under the kasegara, to watch the southern face; and the third, under his own direction, to stand in readiness to lend any assistance required at the eastern face. He cast his eye round the position; the men stood to their arms, expectant, eager, confident; there was not a sign of timidity or cowardice.

From the knoll, five hundred yards away, came the roll of a drum. Raising their weapons aloft and uttering a fierce war-cry, the three divisions of Arabs and Manyema sprang forward at the same moment upon the three sides of the zariba. The lesson taught by their former mishap had been well learned; this time they avoided the stakes at the corners, and charged in directions perpendicular

to the three fronts. For the first hundred and fifty yards they fired as they came, and though, when well within range, they were met by a murderous discharge of bullets and grenades from the earthwork, they pressed on regardless of their many casualties, and within half a minute had reached the thorn-protected zariba.

Then began a desperate and mortal struggle. With the exception of the reserve, still held by Tom as in a leash within the inner entrenchment, every man was at grips with the enemy. Firearms were useless. It was pike and bayonet against scimitar, clubbed musket, and spear. So fierce was the onset that in many places the thorn hedge was cut or torn down, and through the gaps a wild horde of black and turbaned warriors struggled to force a way. The defenders had lost heavily during the enemy's advance, and Tom's anxious eye had noted many weak spots in the double rank of musketeers and pikemen. He himself stood in the middle of the square, to outward appearance impassive, the target for snap-shots still fired, when opportunity offered, by the assailants. A half-spent bullet struck him on the left forearm, inflicting a slight wound which he hardly felt. He mechanically took off his turban and handed it to one of his men to bind tightly about the arm, all the time having his eyes fixed on the thin line of troops fighting gallantly against such desperate odds. No detail of the fight escaped him. On the northern face the enemy were making but little headway; their force there consisted mainly of Manyema, and as yet the screen of mimosa and cactus was almost intact. But on the eastern face, where tall Arabs were led by the gigantic negro, the strength of the garrison was taxed to the uttermost. Most of the Arabs were attacking with scimitar in their right hand and clubbed musket in their left. At first the Bahima's long pikes, thrust out through interstices in the fence, were too much for them, but as the combat progressed they instinctively adapted their method of fighting to the new conditions. Approaching just out of reach of the pikes, they tempted the pikemen to lunge, and then with a sharp stroke of their keen blades either severed the head from the shaft or so weakened it as to render it useless. Tom saw the trick, and was about to give instructions how to meet it when he was delighted to perceive that his men, after one or two of them had been caught, had themselves seen how to avoid the danger by shortening their lunge. Even when the heads of their pikes were knocked off, however, they still made good use of the shafts, bringing them down with tremendous force upon the heads and bodies of all who came within reach.

[image]

Tom in the Breach

So far, though the Arabs fought like tigers, they had been kept outside the wall of the zariba. But suddenly, at the eastern face, a portion of the fencing collapsed as though it were made of paper. Through the gap instantly poured a gang of yelling Arabs headed by the negro captain, before whose huge two-handed sword pikemen and musketeers went over like grass before the mower.

"Bahima, with me!" shouted Tom, springing from his boulder, and dashing forward at the head of his reserve company to stem the torrent. He saw that there was not a moment to lose; if the breach was not instantly dammed the invading horde would carry all before them and sweep the garrison into the swamp.

Among the nine thousand men on that stricken field, Tom alone had, until this moment, been unarmed; but stooping now as he ran, he snatched from the ground the weapon of a dead musketeer, just in time to parry a sweeping stroke of the negro captain that fell upon his musket and cleft the wood to the barrel. He saw the look of exultation in the negro's fierce eyes, but the force of the blow caused the assailant to recoil; before he could recover, Tom was in under his guard and with the butt of the musket struck him square between the eyes. No skull but a negro's could have survived the force of the blow; he did not fall, but halted, dazed. His arm hung for a brief moment helpless at his side, and then Tom, dropping his broken musket, dealt him a body blow with the bare fist which from school experience he knew must be conclusive. The negro swayed, reeled, and dropped like a log; Tom was swept on over his prostrate body and saw him no more. The fight had occupied but a few seconds. Tom's men had thrown themselves furiously upon their opponents; the Arabs, missing the inspiriting presence and voice of their gigantic leader, faltered; in a few seconds more they were overpowered, and now tried to regain the outside of the square.

"Guard the gap, my men!" cried Tom, and seeing that there was no immediate danger of another irruption in this quarter he extricated himself from the mêlée, and made his way towards his post of observation to see how the fight was going elsewhere. Before he reached the centre he knew that the whole of his reserve was now engaged. Two breaks had been made on the southern face and one on the northern, and a small band of Manyema was threatening the flank of the defence by wading some yards into the swamp. On the south, as Tom knew by soundings that he had taken, the ooze was so deep that any man venturing into it would speedily be sucked down and submerged, but on the north there was a fordable though difficult approach, and it was important to repel this attack once for all. Calling, therefore, a few of his best musketeers, he stationed them at the north-western corner, and assured himself that by keeping up a steady fire there they could prevent a dangerous assault in that quarter.

Turning again, he saw, with a pang, that his force had already suffered very heavily. On every face of the zariba the ground was strewn with prone bodies, and

it was a harrowing thought that, in the heat of the fight, nothing could be done for the wounded men, whose groans mingled with the yells of the combatants.

"Where is Mbutu?" was the unspoken question that ever and anon formed itself in Tom's mind. It was past nine o'clock; there had been ample time, surely, for the eight hundred men to arrive from the village, and Tom more than once looked anxiously towards the forest in the hope of seeing Mbutu appear with the reinforcements so urgently needed. Would he never come? On the knoll the five hundred Arabs were still held in reserve; so confused had been the contest hitherto that it must have been impossible for the Arab leaders to form a just idea as to how the fight was going; but they had seen at any rate that their men had not yet been driven away; and if they threw their reserve into the scale, as they might do at any moment, Tom felt that it would be impossible to maintain his ground.

But though he was anxious he was not yet dismayed. He saw that his men, fighting with unquenchable ardour, were slowly getting the better of their assailants. Several times he was moved to utter cries of commendation and encouragement as he witnessed some skilful feat of arms. Mwonda was bearing his huge bulk resistless into the thick of the fight, and largely by his individual prowess and contagious recklessness the enemy were at last driven off pell-mell at all points. But while some ran to a safe distance and threw themselves exhausted on the ground, others clung tenaciously to their position outside the zariba, deriving almost as much protection from the earthwork as the garrison inside. For some minutes there was a strange lull, like that which occasionally interrupts the fiercest hurricane. The war-cries were hushed; the clash of arms was stilled; nothing could be heard but the moans of the wounded. Both sides were gathering strength for a renewed struggle. The sun was rising hot in the heavens, and Tom's men in the glare and heat were too much fatigued even to reload their muskets. Tom allowed them to go in small batches to the water-pitchers, where they gulped down a few mouthfuls, then returned to their posts. The enemy all the time were exposed to the fierce pangs of unassuageable thirst, and many lay panting on the ground, while some crept away to the extreme edge of the swamp, and lapped up the foul scum-cloaked death-dealing water there.

"Will Mbutu never come?" was Tom's unuttered cry.

The restful interval was not of long duration. Tom, whose attention never flagged, noted a movement on the knoll. He saw the gaunt figure of the veteran leader stand before his men, draw his sword from its scabbard, and wave it above his head, while the gestures of his other hand showed that he was addressing the warriors in a fervid harangue. These were doubtless the flower of his army. With the insight born of long experience he had recognized that a supreme effort was necessary to turn the scale, and he was resolved to play his last card.

"Bahima and Bairo and all you my brothers," said Tom, "the great Rumaliza himself is preparing to come against us. You have done well; you have fought valiantly, and fulfilled my highest hopes; but now still more is required of you. Play the man, my brothers. The great chief who has enslaved your people for so many years must not escape. Every man of you must fight like three men this day; every man of you must say within himself: 'Rumaliza shall not return to his stronghold, nor take slaves any more for ever.' He is advancing now, my brothers; be strong, be strong and brave!"

Kuboko's bold words infused fresh spirit into his men. They sprang to their places; the musketeers reloaded their weapons, and every man of them, for all his weariness, stood with a grim look of obstinate resolution. Away on the plain Rumaliza had put himself at the head of his men; Ahmed was at his side. They marched slowly to within a hundred and fifty yards of the eastern face of the zariba, and were received with an irregular volley from the musketeers. Even Tom's stout heart sank for an instant as he saw that the desperate fighting of the past two hours had rendered his men's aim so unsteady that, though the advancing mass offered an easy mark, there were now but few casualties in their ranks. The Arabs shouted as they too observed this fact; they halted, and summoned to them the men who still clung to the earthwork, along with those who had scattered after their repulse. Already Tom had seen what was impending. He massed the whole of his reserve on the eastern face, placing the hardiest and least-wearied men alternately with the others so as to equalize the strength of the fighting line. He was himself pale with anxiety; his whole body seemed to him a bundle of tingling nerves; and as he contrasted his worn-out troops with the fresh and buoyant Arabs advancing, their unstained swords and spears gleaming in the sunlight, he prayed that Mbutu with the missing eight hundred might still come in time to redress the balance. He had so often looked in vain towards the forest that he was scarcely disappointed when, turning in that direction for the last time before the impending shock, he saw no sign of aid. And now with shouts of "Allah-il-Allah!" the Arabs came forward at the charge, Rumaliza himself, whom the breath of battle seemed to have infused with the vigour of youth, maintaining his place unfalteringly at the head of his men for many yards until he was distanced by them. It was a matter of seconds. Then, as Tom turned his head finally from the forest whence no help came, with the stern determination to hold out till the last gasp, his eye caught a glint of light little more than half a mile distant. It was just above the swamp itself. His heart leapt, his eye gleamed with hope. A second instantaneous glance showed him that it was the sunlight reflected from a spear-head; dropping his gaze, he descried a number of small dark objects moving on the very surface of the swamp--the heads of a band of men wading almost breast-deep in the ooze. There were no turbans, no white garments; they were coming from the

north-west; surely they must be no other than the long-expected eight hundred! A glad cry broke spontaneously from Tom's lips; despondency went to the winds; and at that instant the onrushing force of the enemy fell like a thunderbolt upon the staggering parapet. Slashing, hacking, hewing, the fierce-eyed Arabs surged into the gaps made in the last attack. An almost audible shudder passed through the ranks of the defenders as they braced themselves for the last dread struggle. Not a man blenched; they all knew that they could expect no quarter; and Tom, looking at them, felt that with the battle fever in their veins they would dare all.

"Mbutu is with us!" he shouted, knowing that the news would act upon their spirits as a tonic.

The Arabs, with Ahmed, wounded as he was, at their head, were cutting their way steadily through the gaps, enlarging them as they did so, and pressing the defenders backwards by sheer weight of numbers. Behind them Rumaliza raised his shrill voice in encouragement. Every now and then a desperate rally regained a few yards for the garrison, but they were unable to maintain their advantage, and Tom began to dread lest all should be over before Mbutu could arrive. Standing in the centre of the square he felt like the man in the iron room of old fable, with a wall approaching inch by inch to crush him. His last hope rested on the men he had placed at the corners of the zariba. Protected from external assault by the stakes, they had faced inwards at his order, and taken the encroaching Arabs in flank. But Tom saw that they were too few to delay the invaders for more than a minute or two. Could Mbutu arrive in time? Fierce shouts rent the air all around him; the heavy clash of weapons, the flash of scimitars in the hot sunbeams, the gleaming eyes and distorted features, the pants and cries of the warriors, the shrieks of the wounded, made up a terrible scene that well-nigh broke down his nerve. Arabs were still springing into the zariba; the Bahima were engaged on every face, fighting an unequal fight, doing manfully, but receding foot by foot, inch by inch. Tom felt that he must throw himself into the fray. He sprang from his boulder; seizing a bayoneted musket, he leapt to the side of Mwonda as he smote thick and fast upon the serried mass, and shoulder to shoulder with him tried desperately to beat back the overwhelming tide.

Suddenly a tremendous shout rang out to the north. Tom, at that moment beset by three Arabs, thrilled with relief as he recognized the familiar battle-cry of the Bahima. Unperceived by the enemy, Mbutu and his eight hundred had waded through the swamp, formed up, a shivering miry crowd, under cover of the thick growth of rushes fringing the swamp, and darted out upon the rear of the Manyema attacking the northern face of the zariba. Taken completely by surprise, the bewildered negroes turned about, were seized with panic, and without a thought of resistance broke and fled, Mbutu's men pouring after them with jubilant shouts, and taking with their long spears a terrible toll of the fugitives. The

pressure in front of Tom was immediately eased, for without knowing exactly what had happened the whole Arab force seemed to have become aware that the tide was turning. But Rumaliza behind his men lifted his quavering yet penetrating voice in adjuration, and the throng immediately about him threw themselves again into the fray. Tom would gladly have recalled Mbutu's troops to take the main Arab force in flank, but, intoxicated with their success, they were streaming away to the north-east after the fleeing enemy. It was not an opportunity to be lost, however, and Tom seized the moment by the forelock. He saw that the defenders of the northern face, finding themselves suddenly without an enemy, were hesitating what to do. Ordering Mwonda to continue his exertions with even double energy--an appeal to which the weary Titan nobly responded--Tom instructed the commander of the northern line to bring his pikemen to the support of the eastern contingent. Then, gathering about him the panting musketeers who remained on this side of the square, Tom led them out rapidly by the northern gate towards the right rear of the Arab main body. This movement, being covered by the wall of the zariba, was not perceived by the Arabs until the sallying party, skirting the stakes, emerged into the open. Of the four hundred and fifty musketeers who had originally been posted at the northern face less than three hundred remained to follow Kuboko, but coming unexpectedly on the Arabs' flank and rear they were more than sufficient to throw consternation into their ranks. Too late Ahmed saw the peril threatening him. His men were already disheartened by the sudden strengthening of the resistance in their front, due to the reinforcement of pikemen; they had been startled by the joyous shouts of Mbutu's men, informing them that in that quarter the fight was going against them. Before Ahmed could make any disposition to meet the new attack, the exultant Bahima, flushed with the anticipation and assurance of victory, flung themselves with a fierce yell upon the Arab right. At once it crumbled to pieces; there was a general *sauve-qui-peut.* Away into the open plain swarmed Arabs and Manyema; arms, ammunition, everything that might impede their flight was flung away by the panic-stricken mob. Away and away, heedless of direction, trampling on fallen men, stumbling over obstacles, on they sped, some dropping and dying of exhaustion and fright, others flinging themselves on the ground and whining for mercy as the pursuers overtook them.

"Thank God!" murmured Tom, as he stood still a few yards from the zariba. "The fight is won."

There was no need to order his captains to continue the pursuit; they were leading on their men with fresh ardour, and would not return until they had thoroughly dispersed the remnant of the hostile force. Thankful to the bottom of his heart, yet pitying the wretches who lay all around him, Tom returned with a few men to the zariba to do what could be done for the wounded. The square pre-

sented a terrible sight--a sight that Tom could not banish from his memory for many a long day. The ground was strewn thick with the bodies of the slain. More than five hundred of his own men had fallen, and at least twice as many of the enemy. As he surveyed the scene, and set some of his men, tired as they were, to tend the wounded, friend and foe alike, only one thought consoled him for the suffering and the loss of life that day's work had entailed. "It is a retribution and a promise," he said to himself; "retribution on the Arabs for the years and years of untold misery they have inflicted on the people, and a promise of long years of freedom and peaceful industry. It is worth the price."

While the men fulfilled his orders he mounted his boulder once more, and looked across the field. Away in front, on the knoll whence they had started on their last fatal charge, a band of some twenty turbaned warriors had taken up their position, and in a roughly-formed square stood at bay, to defend their aged chief. All around them surged a throng of Bahima, among whom Mwonda was conspicuous. The Arabs were armed with rifles, and as they grouped themselves closely about Rumaliza they did deadly execution among the assailants. But the cordon was gradually closing around them. Calling one of his men, Tom despatched him with a message to Mwonda.

"Spare all who surrender," he said.

The man hastened on his mission. He delivered the message. Mwonda, with instant obedience at which Tom rejoiced, ordered his men to halt, and in a loud voice, audible at the zariba, called on the Arab chief to surrender. The only answer was a rifle-shot that killed the man by Mwonda's side. With a yell of rage the giant sprang forward at the head of his men. He had obeyed Kuboko; his duty was done; the Arabs gave no quarter, nor should they receive any. Rushing on, heedless of bullets, heedless of the men dropping around him, he forced his way up the knoll, his men pressing on knee to knee. They reached the top; there was a short hand-to-hand fight; then, bursting through the devoted body-guard that encircled the gaunt figure of the chief, Mwonda swung the huge two-handed sword he had taken from the prostrate negro captain earlier in the day, and with one blow cleft Rumaliza to the chine.

Then Mwonda lifted his wet sword towards the sun and shouted; and instantly, from hundreds of voices over that reeking field, rose a vast echo of his cry:

"RUMALIZA IS DEAD!"

CHAPTER XIX

Tom's Armada

On the Trail--A Picked Force--Through the Great Forest--The Last of Mabruki--On the Lake Shore--Building a Flotilla--Floating Forts--The Island in the Lake--Forcing a Landing--A Parley--De Castro Expresses Himself--Preparing for the Attack--Mwonda the Dauntless--Fire and Sword--Rumaliza's House--De Castro's Last Shot

It was now one o'clock in the afternoon. For nine hours Tom and all his men had been afoot, engaged in one of the most arduous struggles that native Africa had known. The great fight so long anticipated was over; the dreaded power of Rumaliza, the centre of the hateful slave-traffic, was broken; Rumaliza himself, with his lieutenant Ahmed and many other of his principal coadjutors, lay on the field, and the shattered remnant of the force that left its distant stronghold in such warlike ardour and confidence was routed beyond hope of rallying. But Tom saw that his work was not yet completed. The fortress in the forest still remained. It was no doubt strongly garrisoned; the fugitives would naturally betake themselves thither; the survivors of De Castro's force and De Castro himself would gather there, and in course of time, though they could never expect to recover their old strength and prestige, they might repair their disaster sufficiently to menace for years to come the security and happiness of the weaker tribes. "I must destroy their scorpions' nest," said Tom to himself wearily; "when shall I see home again?"

He saw that his force was too much exhausted to carry operations further that day. Of less than four thousand men, at least five hundred lay dead and wounded; and their exertions had been so violent and so long-continued that the living and unwounded were fit for nothing but rest. Mbutu and the eight hundred who had so opportunely arrived with him were still apparently keeping up the pursuit, and it was impossible to make any detailed arrangements until they returned. Tom, therefore, sent off a messenger to the village with news of the victory, and with orders to the katikiro to bring up two hundred men with a stock of ammunition. He then went with a few of his body-guard to the Arabs' camp, where their vast horde of slave carriers must now be dealt with.

He found that the slaves, at least five thousand in number, had risen and

overpowered their guards, and were working havoc among the effects of their late masters. At Tom's appearance they crowded round him, some of them recognizing him as the prisoner who had escaped months before from the clutches of Mustapha. The poor creatures were wild with delight at the discomfiture of the Arabs, and many of them threw themselves at Tom's feet and vowed that they were his, body and soul, to do with as he pleased. Seeing on them unmistakeable evidences of terrible suffering during their recent march--open sores, mutilated features, scars and weals made by the lash--Tom lost all compassion for the Arabs who had perished in the fight, and was strengthened in his resolve to visit the Arab stronghold and there complete the work he had begun.

He ordered his men to knock off the chains from their necks and ankles, and those who were thus liberated to assist in the work with their fellows. He ordered them also to collect the ammunition, stores, and camp furniture and carry them to the zariba, and then to dig deep trenches and bury the dead. The slaves were suffering greatly from want of water, and Tom informed them of the stream two miles to the south, and allowed them to go and refresh themselves at it, commanding them to report themselves before nightfall at the zariba, where he intended to camp for the night.

Two hours later Mbutu returned, accompanied by a portion of his force. They gave a great shout when Tom welcomed them, and Mbutu, his face beaming with joy, informed his master of his recent movements. With a quickness for grasping a military situation with which Tom had not credited him, he had seen the importance of preventing any considerable concentration of the fugitives, and sent small bodies of men to the right and left to guard the approaches to the forest, and thus prevent any junction of the scattered bands of Arabs and Manyema who had spread out fanwise in the course of their retreat.

"You have done splendidly, Mbutu," said Tom, patting him on the shoulder. "But why were you so late in bringing up the eight hundred men? We were almost at our last gasp."

Mbutu explained that when his brother reached the volcano he found the eight hundred men in a state of great perplexity at the non-appearance of Kuboko. They had waited and waited, expecting to be engaged in some enterprise of moment, and when hour after hour passed away, and day followed day, without their receiving any orders, they had grown angry. Some of them had wandered miles away to the south of the mountain to see if there was anything in that direction that seemed to call for them. When Mboda appeared and ordered them to return, it took some time to collect the dispersed bands, and though they had made all haste, they had found it impossible to march with any great speed over the broken country between the volcano and the village. Mbutu had met them, indeed, a few miles north of the village, and had brought them on, with the fresh men drawn

from the garrison, as rapidly as possible. He was thankful "too much, too much," he said, that he had arrived at such a critical moment. To save time, he had chosen to risk wading across the swamp in preference to taking the longer circuit round it through the forest.

"And you did well," said Tom. "If you had gone the farther way we should have been overpowered, I fear. It was a stroke of genius, Mbutu. The art of generalship is to know when to take risks. Some people call it luck, but I can't see myself why luck should have such a happy knack of favouring the incapable."

Mbutu did not understand this speech, but he saw that his master was pleased with him, and he went with all cheerfulness and contentment to superintend the camping arrangements for the night, receiving willing assistance from Msala, who came up presently in a state of great delight, tempered by regret at his own enforced absence from the scene of the great battle. To please Mbutu, Tom then sent his brother Mboda with a small force into the forest to build a new stockade on the farther bank of the fordable stream, so as to block the way of any Arabs who might endeavour to retrace their steps over the central path.

Next morning, before returning to the village, Tom sent eight hundred of his best men, divided into several bands under trusty leaders, to dog the fugitive Arabs. Some were to scour the country on the outskirts of the forest, others to penetrate the forest itself, press forward beyond the new stockade, and watch every narrow cross-track, every possible alley, so as effectually to bar the retreat of the Arabs except by long circuitous routes on which, as the news of their defeat spread, they would be exposed to the attacks of the tribes they had ill-treated and oppressed. These scouting bodies were to carry with them sufficient food for three days, and at the end of that time to return.

Tom's march to the village was a triumphal progress. The people came out in their thousands to meet him, and in a great glad throng, amid the din of drums and loud songs of victory, escorted him to his head-quarters. Mwonga ordered several of his finest oxen to be killed for the victor's feast, and extensive preparations were made for high jubilation. Tom could not but be sympathetic towards the people's rejoicings, but he recognized the danger of their imagining that nothing remained to be done, and he determined at once to make the situation clear to them. Early in the afternoon he summoned all the chiefs to a council at some distance from the village, where they could deliberate without interrupting, or being interrupted by, the festal proceedings. When they were assembled he made a short address to them, in which he reviewed what had been accomplished, and clearly stated what had yet to be done.

"True, the Arabs are scattered," he said. "You have all done nobly. But many of your men have been killed; many of your women are widows and your children fatherless to-day. If your sacrifices, your toils, your wounds, are not to be useless,

you must not stay your hands until this nest of venomous snakes is utterly destroyed. You must make one more effort, my brothers. It may not be a great one. The flower of the Arab army is destroyed; there cannot be more than a handful at their stronghold. Our successes hitherto will have encouraged you, and you will not fail to see that by one final blow you may destroy your enemies for ever. If, however, you let slip this opportunity, the Arabs will in time recover even from this great defeat, as they have recovered from defeats in the past, and by and by the old evil work of raiding for ivory and slaves will begin again. I myself will lead you to this Arab stronghold, and in a few weeks the impregnable fortress of which they boast shall be a heap of smoking ruins."

The majority of the chiefs shouted an instant assent to Kuboko's proposal, but some murmured discontentedly, and declared that they had done enough; the Arab stronghold was far away, and they wished to get back to their own villages and resume their ordinary life. Tom accepted the position good-humouredly.

"Let those who wish to go to their homes go," he said. "I understand their feeling. I myself long ardently to see my own home again. Let them go, then; and I thank them for their brave and willing services. But for the rest--I ask you, brothers, shall we sacrifice a little more, and make the Arabs drink to the dregs the bitter cup they have so often brewed for you their victims?"

"We will! we will!" cried most of the chiefs.

"It is well. Now, we have a long march before us, my brothers, but 'tis a long track that has no end. We shall reach their stronghold; we shall capture it, and if perchance a great booty, stores of ivory stolen from you, should fall into our hands, I promise you it shall be divided among you in proportion to the number of men you severally furnish."

The prospect of booty, conjoined with their deep-seated hatred of the Arabs and their exultation at their recent victory, made the chiefs all eagerness to attempt the new enterprise. Many of the murmurers were now among the most anxious to volunteer, and Tom was intensely amused as they tried with every appearance of artlessness to explain away their previous reluctance. He went on to say that he would not need all their men; he asked for only twelve hundred fighting men and as many carriers. But both carriers and warriors must be of the very best; he needed men who were strong and active, and, above all, prompt to obey. He arranged with the chiefs to make a selection during the next few days from among their contingents, and was secretly pleased when he found, as the work of selection proceeded, that the men who were not picked went about with dejected faces, and openly envied their comrades' good fortune.

From prisoners who had fallen into his hands Tom learnt that when the Arab force left, a garrison of about five hundred men remained in the island fortress. They were all Arabs, well armed, under the command of his old enemy Mustapha,

and secure in their possession of a post which they deemed impregnable. Before he could reach it, Tom had no doubt that the garrison would be increased by the arrival of De Castro with the survivors from his luckless expedition, and also by a certain number of Rumaliza's force, who would succeed in evading pursuit and escaping the perils of the forest. He might also have to reckon with the overdue raiding-party from the north. But even though the defenders of the fortress should number nearly a thousand, Tom was confident that twelve hundred of his disciplined and seasoned men would suffice to reduce the place.

Several days were spent in choosing men and collecting stores. Tom could not resist Msala's plea to be allowed this time to take an active part by his side. Mwonda was one of his lieutenants as a matter of course, and Mbutu begged that his brother Mboda might accompany the expedition. There was no lack of arms and ammunition; the chief difficulty that faced Tom was that of provisioning his force during the march through the forest, which he expected, from information received from the prisoners, to occupy nearly a month. While the resources of the village and the surrounding country were being taxed to the uttermost, Tom sent a force of five hundred men into the forest to build a strong redoubt three days' march within its borders, and arranged with one of his allies, the chief of a small village still farther in the forest, destroyed by the Arabs in their advance, to return and rebuild his village, with entrenchments and fortifications. Both these places he decided to make depots for large stores of grain, in order to reduce the work of the carriers with the expedition, and to form reserves in case of a check.

It was a fine day in December, a week after the battle, when the expedition started. Tom was convinced that in point of physique no finer force ever set out on any military enterprise. During the week all that good food and regular drill could do had been done to bring the men into perfect condition, and, looking at their well-developed muscular frames and clear bright eyes, Tom felt proud to command them.

The redoubt was already built and stocked when the column reached it at the end of the third day's march. Two days later, on reaching the native chief's village, Tom was surprised to see what progress had been made with its reconstruction. Men, women, and children were hard at work, running up grass huts and stockading the whole enceinte. When the force resumed their march next morning, Tom felt that the expedition was beginning in earnest.

Then began the long march towards the Arab fortress, a march to which Tom always looked back with mingled pleasure and pain. His previous acquaintance with the great Congo Forest had been made in a time of such stress, anxiety, and illness that he had missed many things which now, as he marched with a large confident force of warriors, he had more leisure to notice. The column was led by a company of pioneers to clear the path where it was overgrown with creep-

ers and bush. Then came a company of musketeers, followed by pikemen, among whom Tom kept his place, accompanied by the ever-faithful Mbutu. Behind these trudged the carriers, strong straight men with no lumber about them, tramping along steadily beneath their burdens, poking fun at each other and at the men in front of them, laughing at any slight mishap that occurred during their progress. After these came the rest of the force, the officers placed among the men at intervals, big Mwonda being in command of the rearguard. The march began each day at 6.30 and continued until 11, when the column halted for dinner and rest; it was resumed at 12.30, and ended about 4 o'clock, to allow time for forming a camp before dark, and for stragglers to rejoin. Ten miles a day was the longest distance that could be traversed through the denser undergrowth, and Tom learnt from the Arab prisoners whom he had brought with him as guides that, allowing for delays caused by rivers to be crossed, felled trees to clamber over, detours to be made to avoid other obstacles, it would take him nearly three weeks to reach the lake in the midst of which the island-fortress stood.

Tom realized now for the first time what the worst difficulties of forest marching were. The ground was rank with vegetable corruption, the atmosphere with exhalations from myriads of dead insects, leaves, plants. At every pace his head, neck, arms, or clothes were caught by a tough creeper, a calamus thorn, a coarse brier, or a giant thistle-like plant, scratching and rending whatever portion they hooked on. Innumerable insects lent their aid to embarrass and worry him, especially the polished black ants, which dropped upon him from the leaves of trees as he passed, and inflicted bites worse than the wasp's sting, till his skin was swollen up in large white blisters. Yellow ants and termites also seemed to have an insatiable appetite, nibbling, gnawing, prowling all day long. There was the mantis, too, a strange insect five inches long, gaunt, weird, mysterious; and numbers of ladybirds, their brilliant red spotted with black. Tom heard the rustling of millions of tiny wings, the garrulous chirp of crickets, the buzz of ant-lions, the dull roar of bull-frogs. And over all the lower sounds was the crackle of twigs, the crash of falling branches, the creaking of the huge, thick-clad stems as they were brushed by the wind. There were leopard-scratches on the boles; a genet cat was occasionally seen; rhinoceroses and crocodiles were met at the broader streams; Tom was told several marvellous stories of the incredible strength of the sokos; once or twice some of his men assured him that they had caught sight of pigmies, who instantly disappeared as soon as they were observed. They gave no sign of hostility, and Tom congratulated himself on the fact that his saving of the pigmy woman's child seemed to have won for him the freedom of the forest.

There was very little to indicate that the path had already been traversed by a large Arab force. Occasionally the advance-guard came upon the remains of a human body, sometimes a mere skeleton with chains still about the neck

and ankles--some poor slave left by the Arabs to die of starvation or by the more merciful agency of the wild beasts that haunted the forest shades. The native habit was to walk round these horrible obstructions in the path, but Tom had ordered his men to remove them into the forest.

On the sixth day of the march his foremost pioneer came running back to him in great excitement. He had come upon a dead body lying across the path, and he declared positively that it was the corpse of Mabruki.

Tom was at first incredulous, but on reaching the spot he saw that the figure stretched on the path was unmistakeably that of the medicine-man. He lay face downwards, and innumerable insects were already at work on his body; but he could not have been dead long, for there was no sign of mutilation by any wild beast. One of the men turned the body over, and then Tom saw a pigmy spear transfixing the traitor's breast. The weapon was evidently poisoned, for the twisted limbs and contorted features indicated that the hapless man had tasted death in one of its most terrible forms.

"Put him out of sight!" said Tom, shuddering as he passed on. He surmised that on escaping from the village to avoid the penalty due to his treason, Mabruki had struck due north and had used his knowledge of the forest to make his way by side tracks into the depths far from the main path. He had struck into that path when all fear of meeting Tom's men was gone, and then, while on his way to join the Arabs, or perhaps to foist his false magic upon some lesser chief, he had met with swift death at the hands of the Bambute.

The tragic end of the medicine-man made a deep impression on the natives. Many of them had believed that he was invulnerable to everything but superior magic, such as Kuboko's, and his death by so paltry a weapon as a pigmy's spear destroyed the last shred of their faith in him. Hearing now for the first time the story of his treason, they were quick to connect his fate with his crime, and said among themselves that white man's medicine certainly reached far and never failed.

Day followed day, and the march was little varied. Once or twice the column passed the sites of what had been small villages, now waste and desolate. The Arabs had burnt and destroyed every human habitation upon or near their path. There were streams here and there to be crossed, sometimes by fords, sometimes by tall trunks thrown across from bank to bank, once on a bridge consisting of a large tree submerged two feet below the surface. Whenever a temporary thinness in the foliage overhead allowed the sunlight to stream fully on the path, the spirits of the men seemed to respond, and they broke into song. Tom noticed the leader in these choruses, a tall handsome young fellow with a fine mellow voice, clearly a prime favourite with the men. His songs were composed on the spur of the moment, but they were picked up at once by his comrades, who raised the cho-

rus in strange wild harmony, Tom had become so accustomed to the ingenuous adulation of the negroes that it no longer caused a pang to his modesty to hear himself made the subject of their pæans. One of their songs, roughly rendered in English, ran:--

"Sing, O friends, sing!
We are all warriors bold, and Kuboko is king.
Aha! Aha!
Strong is his arm and invincible; sing, brothers, sing!
Blithely we march. Ah! what will the enemy say?
On to the fortress; long is the way.
Then we will eat and drink, dance all the livelong day.
Aha! Aha!"

Thanks to the slow rate of marching, regulated by the pace of the carriers, to the good food-supply, and to the physical fitness of the men when they started, there had not been more than fifty cases of sickness in the column, when, after twenty days' marching, Tom learnt from his prisoners that he was but half a day from the lake in which the Arab fort was situated. He pitched his camp that evening with even more care than usual, and gave strict orders that no member of the force was to stir beyond its bounds without permission. He sent forward a few scouts to reconnoitre, and one of these reported, on his return to camp, that he had caught sight of several Arabs making their way rapidly towards the lake.

"The enemy's scouts!" thought Tom. "Well, we could not hope to surprise them."

He posted extra sentries that night, though he hardly expected an attack, and the hours of darkness passed without incident. By ten o'clock next morning, Tom, with the head of the column, had reached the lake side. It was a larger sheet of water than he had expected to see, extending as far as the eye could reach in a north-westerly direction, bordered to the very edge with dense forest and extensive banks of reeds. Some miles off, almost equidistant between the east and west shores, rose the island, a mass of dark green in the blue water. As the warriors came in sight of it they raised great shouts. Not one of them had seen it before, for the escape of a slave was an almost unknown event. Tom himself felt a strange thrill as he looked over the placid water and realized that that distant forest-covered islet was to be the scene of a stern fight. He stood gazing at it in silence, thinking of the long years during which it had been a hot-bed of cruelty and wrong, and he felt a thrill of joy at having attained the desire of his heart--the opportunity to strike at the head of the slave-dragon. "And," he said to himself,

"please God, I will strike hard!"

No well-trodden path led to the lake side. The men had had to make a way for themselves through the underwood. On reaching the edge they came upon clear signs of human activity--a rough landing-stage of boards, litter and debris of all kinds. But no human being except Tom's own men was in sight, nor, so far as could be ascertained, was any boat moored along the shore, though the banks of reeds might well conceal many craft.

"Mbutu," said Tom, "clamber up that tall tree and tell me what you see."

Mbutu, agile as a monkey, was soon swarming up a straight trunk.

"I see a boat!" he cried, when he came near the top. "Long, long way; go dis way"--he waved his arm from east to west. "Go from shore to island. Small canoe; four men. No more, sah."

Tom called up a prisoner, and, questioning him, learnt that the canoe was probably crossing at the shortest passage, requiring only half the time that would be taken from the point at which the expedition had struck the lake.

"Anything more to be seen, Mbutu?"

"No, sah, nuffin."

"Come down, then; we'll have to do a little scouting."

A path ran round the lake close to the edge, narrow and much overgrown, but evidently leading to the spot from which the canoe had started for the island. Tom sent fifty of his best scouts, under Mboda, to explore this path.

"If you come across any canoes, seize them," he said. "Don't fight if they are defended in force; they probably won't be worth losing lives for."

While the scouts were gone he ordered the men to form an entrenched camp. For all he knew the enemy might be lurking in the forest ready to take advantage of any slip, any sign of unwariness; and until he had located the Arabs, and, if possible, discovered what their strength was, it was impossible to form definite plans for an attack on the fortress.

Towards dusk Mboda returned with his men and reported that the path grew wider and less obstructed as it bent northward. They had seen one canoe, manned by a crew of half a dozen Manyema, who had shipped their paddles and jeered when they caught sight of the scouts. The best marksmen among these had tried a shot at the canoe, which, though it had fallen short, had been sufficient to set the men hastily paddling towards the island. Mboda had tried to see exactly where their landing-place was, but the shore of the island appeared to be an impenetrable wall of jungle.

When the evening meal had been eaten, and the camp-fires were lit, Tom sent for his prisoners again and subjected them to a further interrogation. He learnt that the lake was fed by a small river flowing from the north-east, as well as by numerous rivulets at other points. The surplus water escaped on the left,

where it formed a fairly large stream. The mouth of the river on the north-east was fringed with dense clumps of reeds.

"Since there are apparently no canoes to be captured we shall have to make some," said Tom to himself; "and that will take time. I hope our stock of food will last till we capture the Arabs' stores. Dug-outs will be the easiest to make, I suppose. These men of mine have never made a canoe in their lives, I suspect. Msala," he said aloud to the katikiro, "could you make a canoe, do you think?"

Msala looked doubtful, but at length said that he thought he could if Kuboko would show him the way!

"Like the genius who had never played the fiddle, but thought he could if he tried!" thought Tom. "O wise man!" he said. "That's a good answer. I'll try to show you the way, though I've done nothing of the sort since I broke a dozen pen-knives carving a sailing-boat when I was a boy of twelve. The first question is, where are these canoes to be made, eh?"

Msala could give no assistance towards solving this problem, but Tom soon thought it out for himself. The outlet on the west was wide, the prisoner had said, and comparatively free from reeds. Operations there would run the risk of being disturbed, for no doubt the enemy possessed a considerable flotilla on the island. But the reeds at the mouth of the river on the north-east would serve as a screen, and a few sharpshooters carefully posted would easily defend the position against attack.

"That's the place, evidently," said Tom. "To-morrow morning, Msala, we'll start building our fleet. Now for sleep, my men--we must be up early in the morning."

Next day he ordered his men to build a block-house where he had emerged from the forest, so as to intercept any fugitive Arabs who might have found their way back to the lake, and to keep a general look-out. Leaving a garrison of two hundred men there, he started with the rest towards the north-east corner, which they reached after an arduous march of fifteen miles, the path having to be cut after they left the principal landing-stage opposite the eastern shore of the island. It happened to be a particularly bright and clear day, and at different points along the route Tom caught glimpses of the island, which enabled him to form a fairly good idea of its character and extent. He judged it to be about a mile long; it was covered with vegetation of the nature of jungle, tall forest-trees being conspicuously absent. The prisoners pointed out the exact spot, near the centre of the island, where the fort was situated, but so dense was the thicket that not a corner of it was visible. They explained that, while the forest-growth at the shore was allowed to remain in its pristine wildness, within this fringe and behind some plantations the ground had been cleared, and the fort, capable of containing two thousand men, had been built on a slight eminence in the very centre of the is-

land. It consisted of a double row of palisades, fifteen feet in height, the exterior palisade being defended throughout its whole circuit by a glacis, with a slope of one foot in four.

"So there are two difficulties to surmount," thought Tom. "First, the difficulty of reaching the island and landing my men; then the difficulty of storming a fort defended by such high outworks and a glacis to boot. It's a case of scaling-ladders as well as canoes. A great piece of luck that I thought of bringing so many artificers among the carriers."

When the force reached the mouth of the river, it was too late to begin the work of constructing canoes. Tom ordered his men to make an entrenched camp, and to throw up a special earthwork behind the screen of reeds, where a company of picked marksmen could easily defend the canoe-makers from attack. Early next morning Tom set all his men who had axes to fell the largest and straightest teak in the forest, a few hundred feet from the shore. When the trees were felled, another band of men was set to strip off the foliage and bark, and so quickly did they work that by nightfall a large number of huge logs lay ready for scooping out, varying in length from forty to sixty-five feet. Tom saw that he would need a fleet of about forty-five canoes if he intended to convey all his force to the island at one time, as would probably be necessary. He therefore selected the requisite number of trees himself, and while the carriers were felling these he instructed the warriors how to dig them out. He divided them into gangs of twenty to thirty, each gang to form one canoe crew, and he set these to fashion their own craft. He marked off equal lengths along the logs, and gave each man his own portion to scoop out with knife or pike-head, encouraging them to work hard by the promise of a reward to the man who finished his portion first. They all worked with a will, driving their tools into the wood with unfaltering zeal, and showing much interest in their novel work.

While the digging-out was in progress, Tom employed other men in making thwarts and rough paddles, and the best carpenters in constructing scaling-ladders. After ten days' work he was in possession of forty-five dug-outs, with their due equipment of paddles, and fifty ladders ten feet high. The canoes were, of course, keelless, and Tom knew that they were bound to sway and roll with the slightest movement of the body; but fortunately there was little likelihood of their having to encounter rough weather, and he hoped that they would suffice to convey his men across the four miles separating the lake shore at this point from the island. "They'll do as well as Napoleon's flat-bottom boats, I expect," he thought; "or better, for his invasion never came off, and mine will."

The work had not been carried on for ten days without molestation. Every day canoes came from the island, filled with armed men, evidently curious to learn what was going on out of sight. On the first day they paddled towards

the mouth of the river, and Tom ordered his men behind the earthwork to allow them to approach well within gunshot, and then to let them have a sharp volley. The canoes came within fifty yards of the concealed marksmen without suspecting their danger, and at least half the men on board were hit when the Bahima opened fire. The survivors paddled away in frantic haste, and ever after that the canoes kept out of harm's way, the Arabs contenting themselves with patrolling the lake, in cheerful assurance that their fortress was impregnable. All this time Tom sent scouting-parties regularly along the shore, from whom he learnt that at several points on the western side there were large clearings, which appeared to have been slave settlements, and he concluded that the slaves had either been withdrawn into the island or sent deeper into the forest.

His preparations so far being complete--and none too soon, for the stock of food was running low,--Tom decided to make a reconnaissance towards the island. He first tested some of his canoes on the river, out of sight from the Arabs, employing a few men who knew how to paddle, and found to his great pleasure that, though clumsy and incapable of being propelled swiftly, they rode the water fairly upright, and were safe enough in a calm. He therefore ordered his men to launch half a dozen of the canoes at the mouth of the river, and with these fully manned with riflemen he moved slowly towards the island. The movement was instantly observed; hardly a minute had elapsed before a fleet of twenty light, swift canoes, filled with armed Manyema, shot out from the island and made towards him. Recognizing that he could not hope to vie with them in speed, and that he could not approach the island so closely as he wished without running great risks, Tom ordered his men to paddle back, and regained his camp. A tremendous yell of delight from the Arabs' canoes, ringing clear over the still water, bore witness to the enemy's confidence, but Tom only smiled. He remembered reading, in one of Stanley's books, an account of how that great explorer had defended some canoes from attack in precisely similar circumstances, and once more he found his recollection serve him well. He sent his men into the forest, some to cut long poles an inch thick, others to cut poles three inches thick and seven feet long, a third band to cut straight long trees four inches thick, and a fourth to remove the bark from all these and make bark-rope. While this was being done Tom selected three of the longest canoes, and had them drawn up parallel to one another near the water's edge, and four feet apart. As the stripped trees were brought up they were laid across the canoes, and lashed firmly to the thwarts with the bark-rope. Then the seven-foot poles were lashed in an upright position to the thwarts of the outer canoes at the extreme edge, and the inch-thick rods were twisted in and out among these uprights, just as gipsies make baskets. After this, thin saplings were woven in through any remaining interstices, and at the end of the day the structure resembled a huge oblong stockade of basket-work, sixty-five feet long

and twenty-seven feet wide. A gap having been cut in one of its faces, and a rough gate made, the contrivance was complete.

Next morning Tom went to a distance of three hundred yards and tried a shot at the stockade with one of his men's rifles. The bullet penetrated the wall, but fell dead inside. He then ordered his men to collect reeds and large leaves from the toughest plants they could find, and with these to line the inside of the palisade. When this was done he tried another shot, and found that the bullet embedded itself in the lining. Delighted with the assurance that the structure was practically bullet-proof, he next instructed his men to make loopholes at intervals along the sides, and then ordered eight hundred of the carriers to haul and push the strange, awkward-looking fort to the water. He then sent sixty paddlers to take their places on the thwarts, and a hundred and fifty musketeers to find room among them. He was in some anxiety lest with its full complement of men the fort should be too heavy to float, but a few moments' paddling convinced him that, unwieldy as it was, it would ride the water, though to propel it with any speed was out of the question. A great shout of applause burst from the onlookers as the floating fort moved a few yards towards the lake. Tom ordered it back, stepped on board, closed the gate, and started on his reconnaissance.

The warriors left on shore watched the progress of the strange craft across the lake. It went on slowly and steadily towards the island, and reached the middle of the channel before any sign of movement was made by the enemy. Then forty canoes swept out swiftly from the island's green bank, and in one of the foremost, as it came more clearly in sight, Tom, spying through one of the loopholes, saw his old enemy De Castro. The canoes came on rapidly; when within four hundred yards they stopped dead, and the men on board of them opened fire. The worst marksman could hardly have missed so huge a target, and the exposed wall of the redoubt rang with the impact of hundreds of bullets, only a few of which penetrated, to fall quite harmlessly in the water between the canoes. Tom then ordered the paddlers to slew the fort round, so that it presented one of its longer sides to the enemy, and a few moments later a volley burst from the loopholes, doing considerable damage among the crowded craft of the Arabs. Seeing that the inventiveness of the English lad had once more proved too much for him, De Castro, with a curse, ordered his men to paddle back to the island, and Tom was left to make his reconnaissance unmolested.

Slowly the unwieldy mass moved round the island--slowly, steadily, like some uncouth leviathan. Even Tom's own men on shore, who had seen it made, watched it with awe, and some of them cried out that it was a spirit in monstrous shape. As he circumnavigated the island, Tom kept a keen look-out towards it, and found that there were several possible landing-places, the shore being comparatively low. Deciding that the most convenient point of debarkation was a sparsely

wooded tongue of land at the south-east corner, Tom made a careful mental note of the whole position, and returned to his own quarters, well satisfied with his day's work.

The next two days were spent in constructing two similar floating redoubts, and in practising the men in paddling, for the majority of them were helpless on the water. Tom was loth to delay his attack, and feared that De Castro might make an attempt to escape. He therefore withdrew half the men from the block-house at the edge of the forest, and kept them, along with men from his force, constantly patrolling the shores of the lake, to watch for any movement from the island. His fears were groundless, as he afterwards discovered. De Castro did indeed suggest to Mustapha that the principal men should decamp with the treasure, leaving the fort to its fate, but the Arab curtly refused. He had sworn an oath on the Koran before Rumaliza's departure to defend the treasure till the last, and he himself had a bone to pick with the audacious English youth who had tied him up with his own rope in his own hut. He was, besides, so positive that the enemy, even if he effected a landing, would fling himself in vain against the defences, that he scoffed at De Castro's fears and taunted him with cowardice.

At dawn on a bright January day Tom set forth on his momentous enterprise. The three redoubts, each with two hundred men on board, led the way, followed by thirty canoes fully manned, these last containing the worst marksmen in the force. Tom half expected that the enemy, having already proved their helplessness against the floating forts, would make no attempt to oppose his landing; but he soon saw that his passage was not to be uncontested. Forty-five canoes came out to meet him. At a distance of a thousand yards the Arabs' flotilla divided into two squadrons, and, rowing three strokes to the one of Tom's paddlers, evidently intended to sweep behind the cumbrous redoubts and fall upon the canoes, a design which Tom at once took steps to defeat. He was himself in the centre redoubt. He ordered the other two to move off to right and left until there was a clear quarter of a mile between him and them. The formation of his flotilla had then roughly the shape of a bent bow, the three redoubts representing the arc and the canoes the angle formed by the stretched string. By thus extending his front, Tom compelled the Arabs to make a wide circuit. Even then they passed within range of the loopholed faces of the floating forts, and suffered severely from the merciless volleys poured out by the Bahima. Drawing out of range, they had just begun to converge behind the redoubts when Tom ordered these to stop, thus allowing time for his canoes behind to close up and pass between them. The position was now reversed, the bow being pointed in exactly the opposite direction, Tom's canoes nearest the island, and the Arabs' farthest away. Within his redoubt Tom could distinctly hear the wild threats and cries of De Castro as he ordered his men to swing round and paddle back to the island.

"He's afraid we shall be there first," said Tom with a smile to Mbutu.

His move had completely disconcerted the enemy, who abandoned outright the attempt to delay the progress of the flotilla, and made off at full speed to the island. There most of the armed men disembarked, and the unarmed paddlers, with a few Arab marksmen as guard, withdrew the canoes towards the north.

[image]

The Fight on the Lake

Tom's redoubt arrived without mishap off the spot selected for the landing, and was there met by a tremendous fusillade from the enemy concealed in the wood. Thanks to the stoutness of his palisade, he sustained no casualties, but it was evident that his men would suffer severely if they landed before the woods were cleared. He knew from his prisoners that thick copses stretched northwards and westwards from the tongue of land he had arrived at; about a hundred and fifty yards inland they gave place to plantations of pine-apples, bananas, and other fruits; then came another belt of wild woodland fifty yards deep. Judging from the hotness of the enemy's fire that the woods coming down to the shore were full of marksmen, he decided that these must at once be cleared. He ordered the separate canoes to stand off for the present out of range, and then sent two of the redoubts northwards to hug the shore, and halt about a hundred yards up, while he had his own redoubt propelled for the same distance to the west. At a given signal, the men in the redoubts opened fire through the loopholes, their fire crossing over the south-east corner of the island, enfilading the copses that commanded the landing-place. After half an hour of this, Tom came to the conclusion, from the sudden cessation of the enemy's fire, that they had abandoned their positions and fallen back into the belt of woodland nearer the fort. He therefore landed two hundred fighting-men from each of the two redoubts, unperceived by the Arabs, and sent one redoubt up coast northwards, and another to the west, to divert, if possible, the enemy's attention from movements in their front. Then, running his own redoubt on to the tongue of land, he ordered the canoes in the offing to paddle up swiftly and disembark their men, retaining the men in his own redoubt to protect the landing-parties. But no attack was made; the landing was quickly effected. Tom then threw open the gate of his redoubt, disembarked his fighting-men, and sent the redoubt back to the mainland to fetch the scaling-ladders, and a supply of food and ammunition, including a number of fire-balls he had brought with him from the village.

He had now more than a thousand men safely on the island. As soon as

they were formed up, he led eight hundred forward to penetrate the copse, and, after discovering by means of skirmishers that the movements of the redoubts had, as he hoped, drawn off a large body of the enemy from his front, he threw his men across the plantations and into the farther wood. There, after a sharp fight, in which his men distinguished themselves by the nimbleness with which they worked forward under cover of the trees, he had the satisfaction of seeing the Arabs bolt across the open space beyond, and enter the fort by the gate in the outer stockade. Between himself and the glacis the land was absolutely clear of trees.

There were three gates to the fort, as Tom had learnt from the prisoners, one at the north, one at the east, and the one at the south by which the Arabs had just entered. Before sunset he had formed an entrenched camp opposite the eastern gate, into which he drew the whole of his force. Next morning he sent one redoubt, accompanied by five canoes, each way round the island to search for the Arab flotilla, surmising that the enemy, fearing an assault in front, would not venture to despatch a sufficient force to protect their boats. It turned out as he hoped. The redoubts returned in the afternoon, and reported that the enemy's canoes were found moored along the northern shore, under the charge of a mere handful of Manyema, who, when they saw the mysterious forts bearing remorselessly down upon them, did not wait to fire even one volley, but incontinently fled. Mwonda, who had been in command of the expedition, gleefully pointed to the long lines of canoes which he had brought back with him, towed by the redoubts and by the ten canoes which had accompanied them.

"Well done, Mwonda!" said Tom. "Now we will keep twenty of the captured canoes for our own use; the rest you can tow out into the lake and set on fire. We shall thus effectually prevent any of our enemy from escaping."

The men cheered wildly as they saw the blaze on the surface of the water, and clamoured to be led against the fort. But Tom called the katikiro, the kasegara, and other chief men to his side.

"My friends," he said to them, "I have come to beat the Arabs, as you know. But in the fights we have already had much blood has been shed. It would be right, I think, t avoid further loss of life, both among ourselves and among the enemy, for many of them, as you know, are Manyema, who only fight for the Arabs their masters, and would be incapable of mischief without their leaders. I propose, therefore, to invite Mustapha, the chief in command, to surrender."

Every member of the little council was absolutely averse to this unexpected proposal. Msala declared that he had come to kill Arabs; he would rather kill them in fair stand-up fight, but if they surrendered he would kill them all the same, so that no bloodshed would be saved among them at any rate.

"Msala," said Tom sternly, "you have ill learnt the lessons I have tried to

teach you. If the Arabs surrender they shall not escape altogether, but they must not be killed. I should hand the leaders over to the Congo Free State to be tried by its courts, like the court of justice in our village, of which you are such an ornament, Msala. The rest of the enemy I should allow to go free, but without firearms, and thus incapable of doing further mischief."

The katikiro still raised objections, but Tom combated them one by one, and at last brought all the officials to agree to his proposal. Accordingly he called up Mboda, Mbutu's brother, as one of the most intelligent of the men with him, and sent him forward under a white flag to the gate of the fort, with directions to ask for Mustapha himself, and to deliver to him in form the summons to surrender. The messenger returned in about half an hour. He had spoken with Mustapha, who was accompanied by a little dark man with evil face. Mustapha had at first refused to treat, but at De Castro's request had at length agreed that a meeting should take place between the opposing leaders half-way between the camp and the fort. He proposed to come himself with two of his chief men, all unarmed, and he invited Kuboko to do likewise. Mboda had only just delivered this message when Mbutu broke in impetuously:

"Not go, sah," he said. "De Castro bad man; him come; him remember sah knock him down; him no friend; him no speak good words. Mustapha too; him tied; him berrah mad, oh yes! Not go, sah."

"Don't be afraid, Mbutu. There is honour among thieves. They have themselves proposed to come without arms. We shall merely have a talk, and be done with it. Go back, Mboda, and say that I agree to the proposal, and will meet Mustapha and his friends in an hour's time midway between our positions. Both sides, it is understood, will come unarmed."

An hour later Tom set off to the meeting, accompanied by Mwonda, and by Mboda as interpreter. He thought it well not to provoke the two hostile chiefs unnecessarily by bringing Mbutu before them, and Mbutu, much against his will, remained in the camp, his heart filled with misgiving. To relieve him, Tom said, just before he started:

"You can keep a sharp look-out, Mbutu, and if you do see any open movement of treachery, which for my part I do not expect, you will order a company of men to fire, taking care not to hit me or my friends, you know."

As he approached the meeting-place he saw three men issue from the gate of the fort. He looked at them with interest. There was his old enemy Mustapha, his opponent in single-handed fight, his captor, and his victim. By his side, dwarfed by the Arab's giant frame, was De Castro, his red shirt and yellow breeches seeming all the more gaudy beside the white robes of the Arabs. The third figure--it was with a start that Tom recognized Mahmoud the hakim, who had befriended him to the utmost of his power during his short captivity months before. The two

little groups met in the open field, and bowed ceremoniously, no outward sign of recognition passing between Tom and the other side. Curiously scanning the features of the Portuguese, Tom almost found it in his heart to pity him. His face was lined and haggard, its expression was fierce and darker than ever; the iron of disappointment and defeat had evidently entered deep into his soul. He eyed Tom with an insolent and malignant scowl, and kept clenching and unclenching his fists. Mustapha was much more composed, preserving the impassivity so characteristic of his race.

Tom wasted no time in preliminaries. He gave no explanation of his presence there at the head of a great force of armed Bahima; he courteously but plainly stated the terms he had come to propose--unconditional surrender, the leaders to be placed in the hands of the Free State Government, their followers to be disarmed and dismissed. If these terms were not accepted the fort would be stormed. Mustapha looked at him in silence for a moment; then his eyes flashed, and he cried:

"You come to me to propose terms? You, my enemy! Know that you are in my power. You will storm my fort? You shall never enter it alive. I have waited for this day; my revenge has been long in coming, but it has come at last. I fought you by the river; would to Allah I had slain you! I kept you a captive and fed you; would that I had slain you then! Now is the third time; you shall not escape me."

De Castro, who had ill concealed his impatience, here took a step forward, spat upon the ground, and began to speak in broken English.

"I mock at you, I laugh at you, Inglese," he cried. "You dare threat us? Who has the greater army, I like to know? You take the fort! Bah! Is it a dog's kennel? You talk to me, eh? I talk to you, so; I say, you insolent puppy; you no take fort; no. You go back to your camp, and in a little while our army will come to you and drive you into the water. Bah, I spit at you!"

Tom paid no heed to the furious man's insolence. He turned quietly towards Mustapha, and with unruffled courtesy said:

"Have I your final answer?"

His manner evoked a corresponding politeness from the Arab, whose reply, as translated by Mboda, was simply:

"I have sworn an oath. I will not surrender. I will fight you."

Tom decided to make one more appeal. Addressing the hakim, who had stood hitherto gravely silent, he said in German:

"Mahmoud, my friend, cannot you persuade Mustapha, to abstain from a hopeless contest? You have all heard of my success till now. You, surely, do not doubt that I shall succeed again? You yourself were kind to me; I should be deeply grieved if, during the struggle that seems inevitable, any harm came to you. Will you not induce your chief to give way?"

The stately hakim looked with kindly eyes upon the young Englishman, whose earnest and friendly tone had touched him. Then he shook his head.

"I am an Arab," he said. "Whether we win or lose, whether we live or die, all rests with Allah. I am Mustapha's man."

"I am sorry," replied Tom, and was about to take leave when De Castro said suddenly:

"You speak French?"

"Yes."

Then, speaking rapidly in that language, De Castro suggested that Tom should give him a safe-conduct for himself and his property. In that case he promised to deliver up the fort; he cared nothing, he said, what then became of the Arabs. Tom looked at the traitor with silent scorn. The Portuguese quailed for a moment; then, his face livid with rage and mortification, he glared at Tom's accusing face, and burst out in Swahili, clearly for the benefit of Mustapha, who was looking at him with suspicion:

"Have you your answer, puppy? Will you go? To-morrow I will have you in the fort, tied to a post, and you shall not escape me again. Now I make you my bow."

With a low mocking inclination he turned away. Tom bowed to the Arabs, and also turned. At that instant De Castro wheeled round, whipped a revolver from his pocket, and fired point-blank at Tom. The shot missed, but struck Mwonda, immediately in front of Tom, and wounded him in the shoulder. The giant turned round with a roar like a bull's, and sprang towards his treacherous assailant. De Castro pointed his revolver again at Tom; the bullet whistled past his ear. Cursing his ill-luck, the Portuguese turned just in time to elude the raised arm of Mwonda, and at that moment a volley rang out from the camp; one of the bullets sped past Tom and hit De Castro's left arm. The revolver fell from his right hand, and with a howl of agony and rage he bolted up the field into the fort. Mustapha disdained to run; he walked back in his stately way, and escaped. The hakim was not so fortunate. As he was returning to the fort, a little behind Mustapha, he was shot through the back, and fell. Tom sprang to the fallen man, and at the same moment Mbutu, at the head of a hundred musketeers, came running out of the camp in desperate fear for his master's safety. Tom reached the hakim, lifted him in his arms, carried him a few steps, called Mboda to assist him, and hurried with the heavy burden towards his own camp just as a volley flashed from the fort. The shots were hasty and ill-directed, and, covered by Mbutu's company, who halted and poured a steady fire towards the fort, Tom and his two companions safely reached the shelter of their entrenchments, and, panting with their exertions, laid the unconscious hakim on the ground. Mbutu returned with his men immediately afterwards, the whole incident having occupied little more

than a minute. Tom had much trouble in restraining his infuriated troops from rushing upon the fort without further delay.

"Wait, my men," he cried; "they shall pay to-morrow." And he turned to examine the hakim's wound.

Mahmoud died at dawn, having recovered consciousness for but one brief moment, during which he pressed Tom's hand, smiled at him with the same grave, wise smile, and murmured: "It is the will of Allah; all is well."

Tom buried him on a little hillock at the lake side. Then he set about his preparations for the final struggle, with a fierceness foreign to his nature. His heart was filled with bitter resentment against the dastard whose treachery had brought unnecessary death upon an innocent man. "Within twenty-four hours it shall be finished," he said to himself with grim resolution.

He did not underrate the difficulty of the task before him. From the number of canoes that had met him on the lake, and the number of men in them, he calculated that the garrison in the fort amounted to at least a thousand men. The five hundred left by Rumaliza had been increased by fugitives from his own and from De Castro's force, and further by a completely equipped force of two hundred and fifty men who had returned, a few days before Tom's arrival, from an expedition northwards. With such a garrison, and the advantage of a strong position behind a glacis which could be swept from end to end by rifle fire, the fort was obviously secure against direct attack with a force of only eleven hundred and fifty men. Investment, again, would not only be a very protracted affair, but was likely to fail, for the Arabs were no doubt well provisioned, while Tom had only a scanty stock of food. If they could have been deprived of water a siege would soon terminate, but Tom had learned from the prisoners that a constant supply was obtained from a deep well within the fort. The only method left was a night-attack, and after his previous experience De Castro would unquestionably be on his guard against surprise. Still, it seemed the only possible course, and Tom, after breakfast, sat down to think out the points involved.

The most common danger attending a night-attack--the risk of losing the way and stumbling on the enemy unawares--was absent. Further, the attackers could approach the palisade under cover of darkness with less risk of suffering serious loss by rifle fire than if the assault were made by daylight. By making feints in two or three quarters Tom could throw his main force in overwhelming strength on the real point of attack. And, last consideration of all, the Arabs had an inveterate repugnance to fighting by night, whereas his own troops had by repeated successes gained confidence in this respect. The only great disadvantage was that, unfamiliar as he was with the interior of the fort, he could not be sure in the darkness of directing the attack towards the most vulnerable points; but this drawback might be neutralized by a simple means he had at hand.

A night-attack was therefore decided on. Tom prayed that the night might be dark. He called up one of the prisoners, and made him draw a rough plan of the fort on a leaf torn from his pocket-book. Then he sent one of the redoubts to the mainland to fetch further stores and to bring back a number of carriers with knives and axes. When these arrived he set them to work in cutting a path through the bush on the east side of the island in order that his troops might move rapidly from place to place without being seen. While the carriers were engaged in this task a sudden shout from the south apprised him that something was happening in that quarter. In a few moments a messenger came up with the news that the enemy had made a sortie from the south gate with the evident intention of capturing the canoes, and had driven back the post placed between the plantations and the belt of copse. But this move had been already provided against. When the Arabs reached the shore they saw, to their chagrin, that the canoes lay two hundred yards out on the lake, under the protection of one of the floating forts. Tom sent three hundred men under the kasegara to intercept the enemy as they returned. The Bahima placed themselves just within the copse in a line parallel to the path leading to the gate, and poured in a hot fire at the Arabs as they hastened back. Mustapha, in the fort, was on the alert; he threw out a large force to cover the retreat of his men, and but for this it seemed likely that the sortie-party would have been cut off from their base and annihilated. As it was, they lost heavily, and no similar organized attempt was made during the rest of the day, though occasional shots were fired from the fort as if to show that the enemy was not napping.

Taking advantage of the freedom from serious interference, Tom devoted himself to his plan of operations. He decided that the real attack should be made, not from his camp, east of the fort, as the Arabs would no doubt expect, but from the south. The katikiro with two hundred men would make a feigned attack from a point north of the fort, and the kasegara with another two hundred would demonstrate vigorously against the east. Each of these feigned attacks would be accompanied with heavy rifle-fire, and, while they were in progress, Tom himself would lead a strong force against the southern portion of the palisade, from which he expected that most of the defenders would have been drawn off towards the apparent danger north and east.

At nightfall, then, Tom called his officers together and explained his plans. He was somewhat surprised to see Mwonda among them, for the giant had been badly wounded in the right shoulder. He was still more surprised to learn that the heroic negro had got a companion to cut the bullet out of his flesh, and had borne the terrible pain without so much as a groan. He came now, with his right shoulder bound up, and his musket in his left hand, determined to wreak vengeance in person for the treacherous blow dealt him.

"You are a brave fellow, Mwonda," said Tom. "You shall be in command of the northern force, and the katikiro shall stay with me. The kasegara will attack first, on the east, when I send him word, an hour before dawn. When you hear his rifles in play, Mwonda, you will make a sham attack on the north gate. Understand, you are both to keep up a heavy fire, and shout as loud as you like; but you are not to make a real attack until you get orders from me."

Since his arrival on the island Tom had taken no pains to preserve silence in the camp, and on this night he ordered companies of a hundred men, in addition to the usual sentries, to be kept awake in turn, each for an hour, so that their chatter might delude the enemy and cover up any sounds made by his troops as they moved to their positions. Two hours before dawn the movements began. Mwonda led his men northwards, being instructed to march as silently as possible. Tom, accompanied by Mbutu and Msala, went southwards with seven hundred men, leaving the kasegara in charge of the camp with orders to keep his men talking until he received the signal for beginning the sham attack. With Tom's men went fifty carriers with scaling-ladders, and before starting he ordered one man in five to take a fire-ball in addition to his gun or pike. When they reached the position he had decided on, he briefly explained what they were to do. Then he turned to Mbutu and the katikiro and said quietly:

"If I fall, press home the attack with all your might. The men will follow you if you only show them strong leadership. And, Mbutu, when the fight is over, if I am not alive, I trust to you to make your way to Kisumu, and tell my uncle, if he is there, or the English commander if he is not, all that has happened to me. That is my last request."

Then he sent a messenger to the kasegara. Ten minutes later a sharp volley was heard in the direction of the camp, accompanied by savage yells. Immediately afterwards shouts and the crackle of rifles were heard, less distinctly, from the north.

"My men," said Tom, "now is our turn. Go quietly through the copse, make a rush to the foot of the slope; scramble up, on hands and knees if you must, and make for the palisade. No firing, mind; nothing but bayonets and pikes at first. Don't fire till I give the word. Now, advance!"

Two hundred men being left in reserve, Tom's little force consisted of five hundred musketeers and pikemen, and the fifty carriers with the scaling-ladders. These latter held the ladders in front of them as a partial protection from rifle fire. The whole force moved quickly through the woodland, gained the bottom of the glacis with a rush, and began the ascent. The front ranks were half-way up before their presence was discovered. Then a brisk fusillade broke out from the fort, and several men fell. The rest threw themselves on their hands and knees, and finished the ascent at a scramble. The point made for was a few yards to the left of the

gateway. While the bullets were flying erratically over the palisade, the carriers placed their ladders against it, and as, owing to the slope, they stood somewhat insecurely, Tom ordered four men to hold each while the rest mounted. In hardly more than a minute a hundred men were within the palisade, to find themselves exposed to cross-fires from the gate and from a line of fencing thrown across from the inner stockade to the outer, thus dividing the space between them into compartments. But faster than the gaps were made they were filled by fresh men swarming over the fencing. Tom was over among the first. He ordered some of the ladders to be hauled across and planted against the inner palisade, now more strongly defended by reinforcements which the first alarm had drawn from north and east. The Arabs were firing not only over the palisade, but through loopholes in it. Luckily the invaders had already spread, so that there were no close ranks to be decimated by the fusillade, and in the darkness and the flurry the defenders' fire was necessarily ill-aimed.

"Light fire-balls!" cried Tom in a clear voice. In half a minute twenty flaming balls whizzed through the air and over the inner stockade, lighting up the interior of the fort with its huts and tents, and showing the loopholes in the fencing. These became the target for Tom's best marksmen as he now at last gave the order to fire. Bullets flew fast; war-cries seemed to split the air; the defenders were already verging on panic. Some were making desperate attempts to extinguish the fire-balls, only to become the marks for more of those flaming missiles. A hut was already alight, and Tom's men were now swarming almost unchecked over the palisade. A few fire-balls had speedily cleared out the enemy from the cross fence, and this position was immediately occupied by the Bahima. The katikiro, at Tom's orders, had led a party of men with scaling-ladders to the left along the enclosure between the palisades to a point opposite the eastern gate, and cries from that quarter told that a position had been occupied there. Thus in less than half an hour three positions were held by the attackers. Several huts in the interior of the fort were in flames, and the defenders were rushing hither and thither, exposed to destructive rifle-fire from their own palisades.

Tom had already sent instructions to the kasegara and Mwonda to cease their demonstrations as soon as they saw a strong light in the fort, and to move towards each other and join forces. When the junction was made, and as soon as carriers with scaling-ladders arrived, they were to make a vigorous attack in real earnest at a point midway between their former positions, that is, from the north-east. Profiting by the respite from attack on the north and east, Mustapha and De Castro, who had given their orders hitherto from the very centre of the fort, now began to get their men into some sort of order, rallying them around Rumaliza's house. Hardly had this been done when a great din to the north-east announced that an assault was commencing there.

"Over into the fort, men!" cried Tom as soon as he heard the welcome sound. Up they clambered, up the ladders already planted against the inner palisade, up and over, hundreds of eager men pouring into the enclosure, no obstacle now between them and their enemy. Brought to bay, the Arabs fought desperately, dodging behind huts, seizing every point of vantage, knowing well that their former victims would spare none of them. Many of their dwellings were now ablaze, and in the brilliant illumination scores of the Manyema could be seen using the Bahima's scaling-ladders to escape over the palisades into the darkness. The Arabs themselves held their ground more stubbornly, but their enemies were now closing all round them. The attackers under Mwonda had met with but feeble resistance, for the majority of the defenders at the north-east had been withdrawn to withstand the earlier attack from the south. Mwonda himself, whose bellow could be heard above all other noises, plunged along at the head of his men, swinging his heavy musket, disdaining the few bullets that fell around him, and searching everywhere for the wretch who had shot him when he was unarmed.

As the space between the stockades filled with the exultant Bahima, hundreds of the enemy flung down their arms and begged for mercy.

"Spare all who surrender!" shouted Tom, and the order was repeated through the ranks of his men. Some of the enemy, however, scorning to yield, fought with the courage of despair to the bitter end, and were shot down or speared after they had themselves done great execution on the now crowded ranks of their assailants. Tom had several times caught sight of Mustapha moving about among his men, but not once had De Castro been visible. The centre of the fortress was occupied by a range of buildings of more solid construction than the huts nearer the stockade. It was Rumaliza's own house, a substantial stone structure of two stories, with a veranda running around the upper story, obviously an effort after comfort amid savage surroundings, and modelled on the residences of merchants on the coast. Tom, joined by Mwonda, and accompanied by Mbutu and the katikiro, led a small force of Bahima towards this building, in which he conjectured that some of the enemy, perhaps De Castro himself, had taken refuge. The walls were loopholed, and from these, as well as from the veranda, a hot fire met the little group. Two of the men fell. The door was of stout oak.

"We must burst it in," said Tom. "Find a stout beam, Mbutu. Quick!"

Mbutu darted away, and soon returned with three men hauling a massive beam, obtained by cutting down the post supporting the roof of a neighbouring hut. Just as they reached the door one of the three men was shot through the heart, and a bullet from above struck Tom in the thigh.

"I'm hit, Mbutu," he said. "Bind this strip of linen tightly round my leg; there's the place."

"Come away, sah, come away!" cried Mbutu pleadingly.

"Not yet. This door must come down first. Msala, batter the door in. Come, lift the battering-ram, men! Now then, one, two, three--that's it! The door's started. Now again, one, two, three! Ah! it's down. In you go, men! I'm coming!"

As the door fell in with a crash, the party of twenty men poured in, Tom limping painfully after them. There was no resistance; the room was empty.

"Up the stairs!" cried Tom. "Don't waste a minute!"

Mwonda was already springing up the ladder in the corner of the room, taking three steps at a time. In twenty seconds he came tumbling back into the room, yelling that the upper floor also was empty. At that moment there was a shout from the rear of the house. Bushing out, the Bahima found themselves in a sort of yard. The gate was open, and beyond were evidently outhouses and store-rooms. At one side of the yard was a man chained to a post, and yelling with all his might. By the feeble light from the now diminishing conflagration outside, Tom as he hastened up recognized Herr Schwab. The recognition was mutual.

"Out, out!" cried the German. "Zey are outside."

"Cut him loose," cried Tom to one of his men as he passed by, heedless of further cries from the German.

Mwonda and Msala were already in the narrow lane beyond the yard. There was no sign of the enemy.

"After them!" cried Tom. "Don't wait for me; I'll follow as quickly as I can."

The little band swept on, out of the lane, past the outhouses, into the open ground again. There they learnt that some twelve men had suddenly dashed out into the open, headed by Mustapha and the "small devil", as the Bahima called De Castro. The Arabs had rushed across towards the western part of the palisade, burst open a gate which had hitherto escaped the notice of the attackers, and clambered over the outer stockade. Six of their number were shot as they mounted, but the rest succeeded in getting clear away and disappeared.

Hearing this, Mwonda dashed in hot pursuit with his party. But though, utterly regardless of their own safety, they ran madly down the glacis, into the copse, through the plantation, down to the shore, they saw no trace of the enemy, who, knowing the ground perfectly, had made good their escape. Mbutu had hurried after the pursuers at Tom's command, and ordered them to waste no time in searching. Tom was himself unable to walk farther than the stockade, where he met them as they returned, and, learning that they had failed to find the fugitives, he instantly instructed Mbutu to hurry down to the landing-place and order ten canoes to be manned and to patrol round the island.

"Let them go in opposite directions, and watch every yard of the shore," he said. "I will come myself immediately."

The sky was now lightening with the dawn. Tom ordered four of his men to carry him down to the landing-place on one of the scaling-ladders. His wound

was giving him intense pain, but feeling that if Mustapha, and above all De Castro, escaped, his victory would be shorn of half of its glory, and his work be left incomplete, he resolved that at whatever cost he would personally direct the search for the fugitives. While he was being carried to the shore he ordered the katikiro to despatch parties into every corner of the island to search the woods thoroughly.

Just as he arrived at the landing-place, Mbutu came hastily to his side, and declared that he had that instant seen a small canoe stealing westward. It was now half a mile from the shore.

"Put me into one of the Arab canoes," said Tom; "the lightest you can find to hold twenty paddlers. Order two other canoes to follow."

A few minutes later his canoe was being rapidly propelled in the direction of the chase, which Tom could now see was manned by a crew of six, and had one man in the stern who was not paddling and who had a bandage on one arm.

"Paddle your hardest, men," cried Tom; "that is our arch enemy."

The negroes responded vigorously, and it was soon evident that the chase was being gradually overhauled. The crew of six were straining every nerve to escape, and every now and then the man in the stern turned his head to look at the pursuing craft, and then cried aloud to his men to increase their efforts. Tom fixed his eyes unswervingly on the stern of the fleeing canoe.

"It is De Castro unmistakeably," he said to himself, as the man turned once more. The expression of mingled despair, rage, and fright on his face was fearful to behold. Suddenly he turned completely round, leant over the stern of the canoe, and took aim with his rifle at the canoe now so rapidly overtaking him. The bullet whizzed past Tom's ear. Tom looked round for a weapon with which to return the fire, but saw that not one of his crew was armed with a musket, so great had been the haste of the embarkation. But from the first of the other pursuing canoes, now close up to Tom's, a shot rang out. It struck the side of De Castro's canoe. The Portuguese took aim again, and this time the bullet struck one of Tom's men, who screamed and dropped his paddle. A rain of bullets from the other canoes fell around the fugitive, but he seemed to bear a charmed life.

"He is a devil," said one of Tom's men; "shots cannot hurt him."

Suddenly Tom observed a commotion among the six Arabs. A man that looked like Mustapha rose in the boat, raised his paddle above his head, and, just as De Castro was about to fire a third time, brought it down with tremendous force upon his unsuspecting head. He was leaning forward over the stern; his head fell on the edge, and in an instant the Arab had caught his legs and thrown him over into the water. He sank like a stone, and a dark circle formed in the frothing wash of the canoe. Within two minutes Tom's canoe arrived at the scene of the tragedy, but there was no sign of the victim. Tom stopped the canoe, to cruise round on the chance of De Castro reappearing. The other canoes stopped also, and loud

cries of satisfaction rose from their crews. But when after a minute or two it became evident that the Portuguese would be seen no more, Mwonda uttered a yell of rage at his being thus snatched from personal vengeance. Tom meanwhile had ordered two canoes to continue the chase after the Arabs; but their craft, lightened by the loss of De Castro, was bounding over the water, the paddlers profiting by the temporary cessation of the pursuit. The Bahima paddled hard, and called to the crew of one of the patrol-canoes approaching from the north to join in the chase. But their efforts were vain. The fugitives gained the western shore, ran the canoe between two banks of reeds, and plunged into cover before the pursuers could overtake them. Mwonda dropped his head on his sound arm, and burst into tears. Then, lifting his huge body, and standing to his full height in the canoe, he passionately called upon all the evil spirits of his tribe by name, and adjured them to shrivel up the escaped Arabs with their blighting influence, and to inflict upon them tortures unspeakable until they were dead. Then the canoes were put about. Mwonda uttered one more bitter malediction as he passed over the spot where De Castro had sunk, and was still bemoaning his ill-luck when he overtook his victorious but weary and fainting master.

CHAPTER XX

An End and a Beginning

Mr. Barkworth keeps Cool--In Suspense--Tom's Escort--The Padre's Story--An Appreciation--Tom's Reward--Farewell--Herr Schwab's Lament--Fame--Mbutu Returns Home--Inspiration--Proposals

One morning, towards the end of March, Mr. Barkworth was seated at breakfast at The Orchard, Winterslow, dividing his attentions impartially among his food, his letters, and his daughter, who sat facing him at the other end of the table. His day was never properly begun unless the letters and the bacon arrived together. He had opened two letters, and cut the third, and Lilian was pouring out his second cup of coffee, when a sudden ejaculation from her father caused her to hold her hand.

"Scandalous, 'pon my soul and body, perfectly scandalous!" he exclaimed.

"What is it, Father?" asked Lilian, not very anxiously, for she was accustomed to little volcanic explosions at home: plenty of rumble but no fire.

"What, indeed! Just listen to this, h'm! 'My dear Barkworth, I found an

opportunity in the lobby last night of speaking to the Prime Minister on the matter of a search-expedition for your friend Mr. Burnaby. He was very sympathetic, but said that, much as he should have liked to serve me, he was afraid our hands were too full just now to think of it. One can understand it, poor man. You see, what with these complications threatening in Persia, and the various little troubles in all parts of the world, connected with our imperial policy, one can hardly expect--' Faugh!" He tore the letter across. "Fiddlesticks! I'd like to see Palmerston back for a week. We'd soon see then, h'm! We'd have an expedition off to Central Africa in a winking. We want a little more of the 'Civis Romanus sum' in our milk-and-water politicians. Cicero, you know, my dear."

"But, Father, I don't understand what Cicero and Lord Palmerston have to do with Mr. Burnaby."

"Now, that's just it. Women never can see that sort of thing; your mother couldn't, poor woman! I'll explain so that any child could understand it. Cicero was a great Roman orator and statesman, you know, my dear. In one of his speeches he asked how many Roman citizens his hearers imagined had been insulted with impunity, how many Roman merchants robbed, or ship-owners kept in captivity,--meaning that he defied 'em to say a single one. Now suppose that Cicero had been Lord Palmerston, what would he have said?--tell me that, now!"

"Wasn't Lord Palmerston an Irish peer, Father?"

"Eh! what? Yes, must have been, or he couldn't have sat in the House. But what's that to do with it?"

"Why, Father, if Cicero had been Lord Palmerston, would not he have said: 'Just thread on the tail of me coat', or something to that effect?"

Mr. Barkworth looked sharply at his daughter, but she was demurely peeling an egg. As he was hesitating whether to explode or not, there was a knock at the door, and a maid entered bearing a salver.

"A telegram, sir, and there's a shilling to pay."

"Con-found these extra charges!" broke out Mr. Barkworth irritably. "What's the good of paying taxes to bolster up a wretched Post Office that can't give us free delivery? Give the man his shilling, and tell him not to dare show his face again!"

He tore open the envelope, stared at the message for some moments in inarticulate surprise, and then ejaculated:

"God bless my soul, he's found! Tom's found! We can do without the Prime Minister! 'Gad, didn't I say he'd turn up some day! Listen, Lilian; a despatch from the cable company forwarded by the Post Office: 'Tom found; mail follows.--O'Brien.' Might have said a little more; what's a shilling or two, eh?--Well, Jane, what is it now?"

"Another telegram, sir, and, if you please, this man wants a shilling too."

Mr. Barkworth pulled out a handful of silver, and picked it over.

"Here, I can't find a shilling; give him this half-crown and tell him to put it in the Post Office Savings Bank. Now what's this about, h'm?"

Lilian watched him anxiously as he opened the brown envelope, half fearing it might contain a contradiction of the good news.

"Eh! what!" he exclaimed. "It's from Jack Burnaby himself. 'Tom found; am starting for Mombasa to-morrow; will you come?'"

"Oh, do take me, Father!" cried Lilian, clasping his arm. "I'm sure you won't go without me."

"H'm! Don't know that I'll go at all. Running your poor father off his legs again! Very short notice, too. Just like Burnaby; just as young as ever he was, spite of the K.C.B.--What are you doing, Lilian, waggling your hand about so frantically at the window?"

"Just calling the telegraph man, Father. You didn't give him a reply."

"That's true; well, we'll go, begad. Here's a form. Write it for me. 'Yes, tickets for two via Marseilles and Brindisi.' That's right. Another one to Dr. O'Brien. 'Hurray! always said so.' Now, we must go by the 6.15 up-train to-night, so get your packing done. And for pity's sake don't get excited; try to keep as cool as I am. And so that fine young fellow's found, eh? Where, and how, and when, and what's he been doing? Gad, I want to know all about it. Think we'll catch the 4.20, Lilian; the packing will do itself if only you keep cool."

Mr. Barkworth showed his wonderful coolness by setting everybody in a fluster for the rest of the day. The whole household was called upon to assist him in his preparations. He had a genius for mislaying his things, and then accused the first person he came across of deliberately putting them out of their places; and when the gardener had been called in to find his master's newest suit of pyjamas, and the cook to rout out the straps of his hold-all, everybody was quite ready to see the back of the fussy old gentleman. Lilian got him safely away in the nick of time to catch the 6.15, and after spending the night at Claridge's, they sought out Tom's uncle, and arranged to meet him at Charing Cross for the night French mail.

It was Major Burnaby no longer. His services had been recognized by promotion to a lieutenant-colonelcy, an honour crowned by the conferment of a Knight Commandership of the Bath. Mr. Barkworth was vastly proud of the fame of Sir John Burnaby, K.C.B., and regarded his honours as a remarkable testimony to his own foresight and discrimination. All the way down to Dover he plied his friend with questions, comments, and suggestions, though Sir John explained more than once that he knew nothing beyond the bare fact that Tom was at last found. Ever since the news of his disappearance reached England, Mr. Barkworth had at intervals fired off cable messages at Dr. O'Brien in Kisumu, asking for in-

formation, or upbraiding him for not displaying greater activity in the search; and he was now firmly convinced that the recovery of the long-lost Tom was in great part due to his indefatigable enquiries.

On the voyage out he lost no opportunity of telling the whole story, and magnified Tom's achievements (of which, since the fight by the bridge, he, of course, knew nothing), until the young Englishman appeared a new Cincinnatus, the saviour of his country. He became more and more fidgety as he drew nearer to the journey's end.

"I never in my life so took to a young fellow, never," he would say, to excuse his excitement; "if he had been my own son I couldn't have felt it more."

When the boat steamed slowly into the harbour at Mombasa, Mr. Barkworth was the first of the passengers to cross the gangway.

"Where's Tom?" he cried, without waiting to greet Major Lister, who, like his former chief, had won a step in rank. "Why isn't he here to meet us?"

"Impossible, sir," said Lister laconically. "How d'e do, Sir John?"

"Glad to see you, Lister. You remember Miss Barkworth?" The major bowed. "We're all anxious, of course. Where is the boy? how is he?"

"Ah! you don't know then? Of course; you couldn't have got Corney's letter before you started. It was the padre who found Tom. On the day Corney sent you the cable he had got a pencilled note from the padre, brought here by train from Kisumu, where it had been carried by a native in a canoe round the Nyanza. I have it in my pocket."

He took out of his pocket-book a small, crumpled, dirty note, and handed it to Sir John, who translated aloud the almost illegible writing: "I have just found Tom Burnaby. He is badly wounded. I am taking him, as soon as he can be moved, to Bukoba."

They were all walking now towards the hotel, and a painful silence fell upon the group as they heard the brief message.

"I suppose Corney started at once?" said Sir John.

"Oh yes! He caught the first train. Your cable arrived just before he left, and he asked me to assure you he would do everything he could."

"Of course he would. And you have heard nothing since?"

"Not a word."

"Why Bukoba, do you think? Wouldn't Entebbe have been a more natural point to make for?"

"There's nothing to show where the padre wrote from, but I take it that Bukoba is the nearest point on the Nyanza. The padre knows the German commandant, and has probably arranged with him."

"Ah! it is trying, this suspense; but I suppose we shall get an explanation before long."

"Before long! I should think so," cried Mr. Barkworth. "Burnaby, I'm going across to Bukoba; start to-morrow morning. Never imagined the boy'd be wounded--badly wounded, the padre says. This is terrible, terrible!"

"I guessed you would go on," said Lister, "and wired to Port Florence, as soon as your boat was signalled, to fix a launch for you. We may find a reply at the hotel."

"Thanks, Lister," said Sir John. "Yes, I shall go on to-morrow."

It was a sad and silent party on the hotel veranda that evening. Sir John was almost angry with the doctor for not cabling the whole of the padre's message, though on reflection he saw that he had been spared three weeks of intolerable anxiety. It was a keen disappointment to them all to meet, instead of Tom himself, a messenger of bad news, and they were all disinclined to talk. Mr. Barkworth did indeed find some relief from his anxiety in opening his mind to a Monsieur Armand Desjardins whom he met in the smoking-room. He poured out a recital of Tom's heroic deeds, drawing freely upon his imagination to fill up the gaps, until he had worked the impressionable Frenchman into a fit of enthusiasm. Monsieur Desjardins was a 'functionary' of course, and a journalist to boot, and he seized on Mr. Barkworth as an abundant reservoir of 'copy'. He went down to see the party off when they left next morning, and said to Lilian, to whom he had been specially attentive:

"I burn with envy to see dis Monsieur Tom; truly he is a hero, and I go to put him in a book. Good-bye, mees! you spik French? Oui, je m'en souviens. Eh bien, mademoiselle, vos beaux yeux vont guérir bientôt le jeune malade, n'est-ce-pas? Hein?"

"What's that, what's that?" exclaimed Mr. Barkworth suspiciously.

"Nothing, Father," said Lilian with a blush. "Monsieur Desjardins is pleased to be complimentary."

"Well, it's a good thing he don't do it in English, for compliments in English just sound--piffle, humbug! Train's off; good-bye, Mossoo!"

On reaching Port Florence the travellers found that a launch was waiting for them. They embarked without delay, and reached Bukoba on the third evening after leaving Mombasa. The German commandant--no longer Captain Stumpff, who, like so many of his kind, had carried things a little too far and been recalled three months before--put his bungalow at their disposal, and told them that a runner had come in that very afternoon with the news that Father Chevasse was only a day's march distant, and was bringing the wounded Englishman in a litter. Dr. O'Brien had gone into the interior with an escort of German native soldiers as soon as he learnt where to find the padre, and all the information brought back by them was that he had found the Englishman under the missionary's care in a large native camp. Mr. Barkworth was for starting at once to meet the returning

wanderer, but was persuaded to restrain his impatience and accept the German officer's hospitality.

Next day, an hour before sunset, Sir John, sitting with Mr. Barkworth and Lilian on the veranda of the bungalow, heard faintly in the distance the regular thump, thump of drums.

"At last!" he exclaimed, and, getting up, looked eagerly towards the hills. The sound became every moment more distinctly audible, forming now, as it were, a ground bass to strains of song which came fitfully on light gusts of wind, in strange harmony with the fading light, the red glory beyond the hills, and the sombre shadows of the distant trees. Sir John unstrapped his field-glass, and, looking through it, saw the head of a procession emerge from a belt of wood nearly a mile away. The trees stood out black against the crimson sky; the pale green above was deepening to a blue; and the sounds came more distinctly to the ear--a few notes ascending and descending by curious intervals, the same phrase being repeated again and again in the same low solemn chant, swelling and dying on the breeze. Mr. Barkworth had let his cigar go out, and was walking up and down the veranda like a caged lion. Lilian sat motionless in her chair, her fingers tightly intertwined, her cheeks pale. Not a word was spoken; the only sounds were the light swish of the ripples on the shore, the hum from the woods and marshes preluding the dark, and the ever-approaching song with its melancholy dirge-like accompaniment of drums. The three watchers on the veranda were tense with anxiety. Was it a funeral march? Was Tom coming back to them only for burial?

The procession drew nearer and nearer. It was possible now to distinguish the figures with the naked eye. A drummer walked at the head; behind him there were four negroes bearing a litter covered with an awning; and yes, it was the tall figure of the padre walking at one side. Behind, as far as the eye could reach, stretched a long line of black forms, marching in single file, keeping step to the drums, and singing their monotonous song, that now came low in tone but immense in volume, like a sonorous emanation from the splendid sky. Nearer and nearer; and now the figure of the doctor could be seen behind the litter, and Mbutu by his side. Nearer still; and then, at a few yards' distance from the bungalow, the drums ceased to beat, the voices fell like a breaking wave, the rearmost of the column continuing to sing for some seconds after the foremost had stopped. There was a great silence. The sun's rim had just dipped below the purple horizon. The doctor came forward, and at the same moment the principal drummer gave a signal tap, and a thousand stalwart negroes, armed with musket, spear, and pike, formed up in a half-circle about the litter. Sir John stepped down from the veranda; the litter was brought to meet him. Removing the awning, the doctor showed him a thin, pale, wasted form, with large bright eyes gazing eagerly out into the dusk, which the commandant had now illuminated with a number of

flaring torches. Tom's face broke into a glad contented smile as he saw his uncle looking down upon him.

"Uncle Jack!" he whispered.

The older man murmured a word or two--no one heard them--and laid his hand gently upon his nephew's. Then, too deeply moved for speech, he turned and walked beside the litter as it was borne towards the bungalow.

Mr. Barkworth had been blowing his nose violently, and more than once he lifted his spectacles and rubbed them with quite unnecessary vigour. As the litter approached he took Lilian by the hand.

"Come inside, my dear," he said hurriedly. "Not good for him to see too many at once, you know. Uncle enough for to-night. He looks very ill. Glad we have him, though. Thank God, thank God!"

When the doctor had settled the invalid comfortably for the night, Mr. Barkworth waylaid him.

"Will he get over it?" he asked anxiously.

"Indeed and he will. He has had a narrow shave, but I think he will do. The constitution of a horse, sorr--thorough-bred, nothing spavined, no broken wind, sound everywhere."

"Where was he? What has he been doing all these months?"

"Faith, I have not got to the bottom of it yet; but so far as I can make out he has been administering a corner of the Congo Free State, raising a regular army, smashing the slave-trade, and taching the negroes something of the blessings of civilization. I mean it, bedad; the padre tould me all he knew, but sure there's a deal more to be tould yet.--Have ye got a cigar, Mr. Barkworth? I forgot my case, and have been wearying for one for three weeks. Hark'e! Those blacks outside are beginning a hullabaloo. I must put a stop to that. Come and see what they're after."

The host of natives who had solemnly escorted Kuboko to the shore of the Great Lake had begun to build fires in the neighbourhood of the bungalow in preparation for camping. The German commandant made a wry face when he saw their intention, and had already sent some of his men to order them to a more convenient distance. The awed silence with which they had looked on at the greeting between Kuboko and his friends had given place to chattering and laughing and singing, and the doctor took pains to impress upon them that the noise would disturb Kuboko's rest. His expostulation was effectual; they ate their evening meal in comparative silence.

It was long past midnight before any of the Europeans retired to rest. Seated in the largest room of the German commandant's bungalow, Sir John Burnaby and his party listened while the padre told of his discovery of Tom. Never before had Mr. Barkworth so keenly felt the drawbacks he suffered through want of

familiarity with French. He would not allow the padre's story to be interrupted by any attempt at interpretation, but listened with a painful effort to follow it, and got Lilian, tired as she was, to give it privately in outline afterwards. But he there and then vowed that one of his first duties on reaching home would be to agitate for the compulsory teaching of conversational French, and decided to found a prize at his old school for proficiency in the subject.

Father Chevasse told how, as he was returning by easy stages from a visit to a mission-station at the upper end of Lake Tanganyika, he had heard vague rumours of battles fought far to the north between the Arabs and a confederation of negroes under the leadership of a white man. As he proceeded, the stories became more and more circumstantial and the details more and more extraordinary. He learnt that the intrepid commander was quite young, a man of marvellous powers, able to turn lakes into engines of destruction, and to bring fire out of the heavens. Such stories, even after he had made all allowances for the natives' exuberant imagination, awakened his curiosity; and suddenly it occurred to him that, improbable as it seemed, the white man might be no other than the long-lost Tom. "Nothing British surprises me," he interpolated with a smile. He hastened his march, made diligent enquiry at every village through which he passed, and by and by encountered people who had actually formed part of the confederacy and fought under the stranger's command. The information given by them did but strengthen his growing conviction, and when he at last, under the guidance of a Muhima, reached Mwonga's village, he was rejoiced to find that his surmise was correct. Almost the first person he saw on entering the stockade was Mbutu, who ran up to him, threw himself at his feet, and broke out into ejaculations of delight mingled with entreaty. He was led to a hut in the centre of the village, and there saw Tom, lying on a couch covered with clean linen--Tom indeed, but the pale shadow of his former self. Bit by bit the padre learnt from one and another the story of his deeds, from his capture by the Arabs to the final destruction of their island fortress. After that noteworthy event every vestige of the stronghold had been burnt or razed to the ground. A search was made for the treasure which rumour attributed to the Arabs, and beneath the flooring of Rumaliza's house, in cellars extending for many yards under the surface of the soil, had been discovered an immense hoard, the accumulation of many years--hundreds of ivory tusks worth untold gold. The few Arabs who had survived the fight had been sent eastwards under escort, and their Manyema dependants disbanded. Many of these threw in their lot with the conquerors. Then the Bahima force had started on its return journey, bringing the captured treasure in triumph to the village.

Tom's wound had become more and more painful, and though he tried at first to walk with his men, he found himself obliged, after one day, to give up the attempt, and was carried for the rest of the way in a litter. On the journey he

had talked long and earnestly with the katikiro and other officials, suggesting and advising them as to their movements and the future government of the village in case he died. They had only reached the village two days before the missionary's arrival, and, at Mbutu's entreaty, the katikiro was arranging to despatch messengers to the shore of the Victoria Nyanza with a request for help. The padre at once sent off one of his own attendants under a strong escort to Bukoba, the nearest European station, and the German commandant had forwarded the message immediately to Kisumu.

"My own knowledge and skill in surgery is but slight," added the missionary, "but I did what I could until our friend Dr. O'Brien arrived."

"He extracted the bullet," said the doctor; "capitally too. It was an ugly wound."

"And Tom bore the pain with marvellous fortitude. Happily, he sank into unconsciousness before I had completed my task, and never so much as murmured when he awoke to the full sense of his agony and helplessness. I made arrangements at once to convey him here, and the villagers, whose devotion to him transcends anything I have ever before seen in the natives, of their own accord organized the procession which you have just witnessed. We were already half-way here when Dr. O'Brien reached us, and his skill completed what my clumsier hands had begun. I have given you only a sketch of what this young hero has been able, under God's mercy, to accomplish; indeed, I am not able to fill in all the details, for Tom himself has been too ill to talk, and is, besides, very reticent about his own actions. One fact stands out pre-eminent, and no distrust of native stories can explain it away. He has stamped out a pestilent gang of slave-raiders, and may with a whole heart sing 'Magnificat!' And though we dare not be so sanguine as to expect that the lessons of self-sacrifice, courage, justice, brotherly kindness, he has by his example taught the natives, will never be effaced from their minds, yet they must bear fruit, and certainly he has prepared the way for me and my brethren, Catholic or Protestant. You have a nephew to be proud of, Sir John."

Next morning, the commandant, who had considerately effaced himself on the previous night, resumed his autocratic air, and told the assembled natives bluntly that he would be delighted to see the last of them. In their wholesome dread of the Wa-daki, they took the very broad hint and prepared to return to their remote wilds.

But before they departed they wished to take a formal farewell of the great muzungu who had taught them so much and saved them from their hereditary foe. Msala was deputed to seek an interview with Sir John, and he asked, with his usual eloquence, that Kuboko might be brought out to his sorrowing people, that they might look upon his face once more. Sir John consulted the doctor, who

pursed up his lips and looked doubtful, but confessed that Tom himself had asked that the people should not be allowed to go until he had seen them and bidden them good-bye. Accordingly, about eight o'clock in the morning, Tom was carried out in his litter and placed on the veranda, where he lay in the shade during the scene of farewell.

It was in truth a remarkable scene. Arranged in three concentric semicircles stood the throng of a thousand negroes, including representatives of almost every race known to the eastern half of Central Africa. A few steps in advance of the rest stood Mwonga, the young Bahima chief, with the katikiro and a few other of his principal officers. Their black faces were all aglow, their bright eyes fixed on the tall figure of Sir John Burnaby, who stood just within the veranda of the bungalow. By his side lay Tom--the black man's loved Kuboko--thin as a lath, pale and haggard, the head of his couch raised so that he might see the crowd of natives. On one side, a little in advance, for he had offered to interpret the katikiro's speech, stood the tall dignified White Father, his lips parted in a slight smile, his eyes beaming a compassionate kindliness. With him stood the little doctor, a striking contrast with his short, neat, wiry frame, his twinkling gray eyes, his stubby beard. And on the other side was the stout figure of Mr. Barkworth, his rubicund side-whiskered face cheerful and benevolent as ever; and the fair girl at his elbow, white and radiant, looking alternately at the negroes and at Tom.

The signal being given, the katikiro stepped forward and stood before Sir John. He had never before had the opportunity of addressing a group of white men, and his gait showed that he fully realized the importance of the occasion. Sticking his spear in the ground, so as to have the use of both arms for gesture, he began his oration. The exordium was a long account of himself, his family, his achievements in hunting and war, his importance as katikiro first to Barega and then to Barega's successor, Mwonga. He proceeded to recount with minute circumstantiality how he found Kuboko in the forest, carried him to the village, and from that time on had been his most devoted friend and disciple. He passed on to a chronological narrative of the subsequent events in the village: the contest with Mabruki, the making of big medicine, the protracted siege, the wonderful machines invented by Kuboko for the discomfiture of the enemy, and, finally, the formation of the great confederacy which, by obedience to Kuboko, had succeeded in defeating time after time the enemy who had for many years crushed native Africa beneath his iron heel. All this was narrated with many repetitions, many picturesque adornments, much extravagance of language and gesture, and the padre's translation in French almost did justice to the Muhima's fervour.

But Msala's eloquence was to soar a still higher pitch. So far he had dealt with facts, with just enough embroidery to make the presentment of them artistic. He went on to express the opinions and emotions of his community.

"Never was such a white man seen," he said. "We have had nothing to do with white men. We have heard about them,--about the Wa-daki, who live day and night with kiboko; about the white men of the Lualaba, who buy rubber and ivory at their own prices, or for nothing at all. But never such a white man as this. Surely he must be a mighty chief in his own land. Never did he raise his hand to strike us; Kuboko was his name, but kiboko had he none" (he evidently deeply relished the jingle). "When Mabruki did him wrong, and Barega would have cut off the villain's head, Kuboko said: 'Nay, let him pay back the bulls.' Did he order a thing to be done? He showed how to do it. Was there little food? Kuboko had no more than the rest. He did justice and showed mercy; he even sported with the little children, teaching them how to smite balls with a stick, and giving them turns equally, doing favour to none above the others. And what was all this to gain? The Wa-daki, as men tell us, give one and take two; but Kuboko took nothing. He might have been chief, but would not. 'Nay,' he said, 'I will stay with you until the Arabs are destroyed, and then I go to my own people, and Mwonga shall be chief.' In the caverns of Rumaliza lay thousands of tusks, long as a man, the spoils of our hunting and the hunting of our fathers. All this belonged by right to the victor; but did he say: 'It is mine, I will take all of it'? Nay, he said: 'My brothers, it is yours; divide it among yourselves.' We threw ourselves at his feet, and implored him to take this great treasure, but he shook his head, and even waxed angry, and bade us hold our peace. Only at the last, when Mwonga himself offered the two tusks that have come down from chief to chief, and begged Kuboko, if he loved him, to take them for his own,--only then did he yield and say: 'I will take them as a gift from your people, and keep them ever to remind me of you.' That is Kuboko.

"And now he leaves us. Our women and children are wailing, and our hearts are heavy and sad. Who will lead us now in war? Who will guide us in peace? True, we have Kuboko's words, and treasure them in our hearts; but even as water dries up in the sun, even as smoke rises into the sky and is seen no more, so Kuboko's words, as the days pass, will fade from our memories. Yet how could we keep him? We are black; he is white. He comes from the land of the Great White King, who will assuredly make him his katikiro when he hears what he has done, even as I, Msala, am Mwonga's katikiro. But though he be far away, in the land of big medicine, our thoughts will turn to him. He will be to us as a Good Spirit, to hearten us against Magaso, and Irungo, and all the other evil spirits who blight our crops and steal our cattle. He will be even as the Buchwezi, the spirits of our ancestors, whom we do not see, but who nevertheless see us and watch our doings and maybe help us in our hour of need. We, Bahima and Bairo, Ruanda and Banyoro, bid Kuboko farewell. I, Msala, say it."

It is impossible to do justice in sober English to the impassioned eloquence of the katikiro. As he paused at the end of every sentence to allow the missionary

to interpret, loud grunts and ejaculations of approval burst from the throats of the throng behind him. When the speech was ended, one great voluminous shout rent the air, and every man held out his spear in front of him with the precision of an automaton. The drums gave forth three solemn rolls, and then Mwonga and the kasegara advanced to the veranda, and twenty bearers laid two great tusks beside Kuboko's litter.

"Thank you, thank you!" said Tom. "Uncle, will you speak to them for me?"

Sir John stepped forward and, gripping his coat-collar, began:

"My friends, I am touched by the eloquent words of your excellent katikiro. For many months I had mourned my nephew as dead, and now my joy at seeing him again is all the greater because I know that during his long absence he has been doing good things. I thank you, my friends, for bringing him back to me. I thank you, too, for the respect and affection you have shown for him. The story your katikiro has told is a wonderful one. I cannot profess yet to understand it; but I do understand that by your willing obedience, loyalty, and devotion to my nephew you have been able to rid yourselves, once for all as I hope and believe, of the enemy who has oppressed you for so many years. Men"--here Sir John's right hand left his coat-collar and was stretched out towards his attentive audience--"men, now that you are free, remember the price of your freedom. My nephew owes his life to your late brave chief, whose own life he had saved; since then he has spent himself in your service. Nothing good was ever done except at some cost. You know what Kuboko did for you. The katikiro has spoken of it. Now in his name I beg you to turn his self-sacrifice to lasting account. Obey and support your young chief. You have learnt what union means. Don't quarrel among yourselves and eat your hearts out in miserable little jealousies. Other white men will come to your village. The officers of the Congo State will visit you. Render them willing obedience, and though at times they may be severe, though among white men there are bad as well as good, remember that the great white nations mean nothing but good to their black brethren. My nephew, you tell me, has sought nothing for himself. He takes with him nothing but your good-will and the memory of your common sufferings and common triumphs. It is what I should have expected of him, and I am proud of it. Now we are going home, and very likely we shall never see you again. But Kuboko will not forget you; nor shall I forget this great throng, come so many miles to do him honour. Men, for him and for myself, I say good-bye, and good luck to you!"

When the shouts with which the natives received Sir John's brief speech had subsided, Tom asked that the principal men might be allowed to come to his litter and bid him a more personal farewell. Accordingly, Mwonga, with Msala, Mwonda, the kasegara, and eight others marched up in single file. They passed by the left side of the litter, and as Tom gave them his limp hand in turn, each

stooped down, pressed it lightly to his brow, and descended in solemn silence to his place in front of the attentive crowd. The simple scene was too much for Mr. Barkworth's feelings; his handkerchief was diligently employed, and he was unfeignedly glad when, the ceremony being now at an end, the procession reformed in preparation for starting on the long homeward march. The drums gave out their hollow notes, the multitude swayed as they marked time, and striking up an improvised song in which Kuboko's uncle and the white lady had the largest mention next to Kuboko himself, they filed off westward towards the forest.

Dr. O'Brien insisted on Tom's having a clear day's rest before his journey was resumed. On the second morning, therefore, the party of seven embarked on the launch, and were conveyed rapidly across the Nyanza to Port Florence. Tom thought of the many things that had happened since he last saw the lake, and laughed with something of his old spirit when the padre reminded him of the fight with the hippopotamus. On reaching the eastern shore they took up their quarters in Sir John's old bungalow, and there Mr. Barkworth pestered Mbutu constantly to tell him again and again of the momentous doings in Mwonga's village.

One day, happening to be at Port Florence, he went down to the quay among other curious spectators to watch the arrival of a German steamer from down the lake. As the passengers came off, Mr. Barkworth was puzzled by one face among them, which he seemed to recognize without being able to remember whose it was or where he had seen it. The passenger was a thick-set, bearded man, wearing gold spectacles, limping badly, and carrying a big leather valise in his left hand. As he stepped off the gangway he stumbled, and would have fallen but for the purser's sustaining arm. He poured out a stream of very warm German, and as he limped away the purser turned to a man standing near and made some remark about the testy passenger. Mr. Barkworth caught the name.

"Swob! Swob!" he muttered. "Thought I knew him. It's the German trader I saw last year. And a prisoner in the Arab fort! Hi, Mr. Swob!"

He toddled after the German, who turned as he heard his name thus travestied.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Swob," said Mr. Barkworth, coming up with him. "Extremely sorry to hear of your sad experiences. It must have been a terrible time, sir. And but for that fine young fellow--

"Ach ja!" interrupted Herr Schwab; "I know all zat. I vant to forget it, nozink else."

"Naturally, my dear sir. I do hope that you will not suffer permanently, and that--"

"Not per-ma-nent-ly! Look at me, look at me, I say. I hafe vun leg qvite caput, goot for nozink. I hafe marks on my body zat vill remain till my death-day.

Not suffer! Vy, I suffer vizout end: I suffer in my person, I suffer in my pockett, I suffer in my pride. I suffer allofer. And vy? I did nozink. I go to sell zinks--nozink more--and zey keep me, vill not let me go. Naturally, I protest. I say I appeal to Berlin, and zen zey chain me opp--yes, to a post--me, a Gairman sobjeck--and so am I chained for veeks and veeks. Himmel, but I grow meagre--vat you call skinny. I lose almost all ze flesh from my bones. Zen come Mr. Burnaby. By night zere is vun colossal combat. In ze yard of ze chief's house, zink I, I must be secure. But not so. Ofer ze vall come tousand fire-balls. I call: 'Hafe care, mind me, I am Schwab.' But zere hears none. A fire-ball fall upon my toe, and I am in com-bus-tion. Zen, my goodness! from ze chief's house run hundert shrieking defils. Portuguese, De Castro, so vas his name, struck me vid his sword as he pass me by. Zerefore am I lame to-day. Never shall I forget zat most fear-ful night. Efen still I shiver before ze zought. I vas let free; Mr. Burnaby, I must say, vat you call did me vell; but I hafe some grudge against him. Sir, zere vas hundert tousand pound sterling ifory in ze vaults below zat house: hundert tousand, sure as a gun. Now I did expect Mr. Burnaby to gife me at least--at least, vun tousand pound vorth for damages. I lose qvite so much in commission, to say nozink about ze vear and tear of my intellecks. No more is my brain as it vas. But Mr. Burnaby shut me opp, sir, shut me opp. He say somezink about ze ifory belong on account of law to ze Congo State and on account of right to ze blacks. Zat is not business, it is vat you call rot. He vill not gife me vun single tusk, and ven I say I vill write to ze Kaiser he say: 'Hang ze Kaiser!' Vat is zat for a kind of business, sir!"

The German's dudgeon was too much for Mr. Barkworth's gravity, and he had recourse to the never-failing safety-valve for his feelings--his handkerchief. When he had blown off his amusement, he asked:

"And what have you been doing since you left the fort?"

"I vent to all ze places vere I had left bags. Now I return to my home. Of Africa I hafe now enough. I travel to Düsseldorf, and zere, if ze Kaiser vill not gife me a pension, and if nozink more remains, I establish myself as barber, for I am at least--Mr. Burnaby vill say it,--at least vell capable to cut his hair!"

His tone was indescribably bitter. He continued:

"But first of all I go to Kisumu to despatch vun cable to ze Kaiser. I tell him he shall take ze Congo State. Ze Belgians, vat are zey? No good. Ze Congo State shall be Gairman, sir."

"Well! well!" said Mr. Barkworth, humouring him; "let's hope it's not so bad as that. In the meantime, you'll come and see Mr. Burnaby to say good-bye?"

"I zink not, sir. I nefer forgif him; he owe me tousand pound. Business are business. Long ago I say: 'Step nefer in betveen ze vite man and ze black.' He step in,--and I step out, sir."

And with that he walked away.

Three days after this, the travellers left for Mombasa. Father Chevasse saw them off at the railway-station.

"But we shall see you again?" said Lilian warmly, as they shook hands. "You will come and see us in England some day, won't you?"

The padre smiled a strange, almost wistful smile.

"I may not," he said quietly. "We White Fathers, when we put our hands to the plough, never turn back. I shall never even see my beloved Normandy again. I shall live and die in Africa.--God bless you!" he said to Tom; "I shall not forget you, though I may never see you again."

All Mombasa was on tiptoe with excitement when it was flashed along the line that the wanderer was returning. Everybody knew that he had saved the expedition, but what had happened since then was a mystery, and a fruitful subject for speculation among the European colony. Dr. O'Brien grumbled a little when he saw the crowd awaiting the train at the terminus.

"They might have had the common sense, not to say common decency, to keep out of the way just now. Making a peep-show of us, indeed!"

But he managed to get the invalid into the hotel without mishap, and afterwards referred everybody who applied to him for information to Mr. Barkworth. "He's brimmin' with it," he said. Mr. Barkworth, indeed, was pounced on at once by an inquisitive stranger, who included among his numerous avocations that of occasional correspondent to the *Times*, and who cabled a column of extremely good 'copy' as soon as he had sufficiently pumped the garrulous old gentleman. This fact, no doubt, explained the number of telegrams which came during the next few days addressed to Tom--telegrams of congratulation from strangers, requests from publishers for the offer of his forthcoming volume, an invitation from a New York agency to undertake a lecture tour in the States. And yet not one-tenth of his story had been told. Mbutu had not vocabulary enough to give a consecutive narrative; it was only when Tom himself, after being mercifully spared excitement for a fortnight, was at last pronounced well enough to talk, that his friends wormed out of him bit by bit the whole story of his adventures. He dwelt lightly upon his own achievements, and Mr. Barkworth, when he retailed the narrative afterwards to all and sundry, did not fail to eulogize the "astonishing modesty of this fine young fellow; a true Englishman, you know." All which was duly doled out to the British public by the indefatigable newspaper-man.

One evening, when they had been in Mombasa for about six weeks, Sir John Burnaby was sitting with Mr. Barkworth, Major Lister, and the doctor in the smoking-room of the hotel. They were the only occupants of the room. The doctor had just announced that Tom would be well enough to leave for home by the boat sailing in three days, and the pleasure of all the gentlemen had been expressed in Mr. Barkworth's exclamation: "That's capital!" For a time they sat in silence,

puffing at their cigars, each thinking over the events of the past twelvemonth in his own way. Then Major Lister, who was not usually the first to speak, said suddenly:

"Tom going back to Glasgow, sir?"

"That's a question that's been puzzling me," returned Sir John. "On the one hand, he has gone a certain way in his profession and might do well in it; on the other--"

"On the other, Burnaby," interrupted Mr. Barkworth, "he's not going back if I know it. Why, the boy's a born soldier and administrator, h'm; I knew it!"

"To tell the truth," said Sir John, "I've been wondering whether, on the strength of his doings out here, we couldn't get him a crib in the Diplomatic Service, or, if he wants to stay in Africa, in the service of one of the companies or protectorates. He asked me the other day if the Congo Free State people would give him something to do."

"That's out of the question," said Mr. Barkworth decisively. "I've read a lot of things I don't like about these Belgians, and if there is anything fishy in their methods of administration, the youngster would only eat his heart out. No; he's an Englishman; let him stick to the old country and the old flag, h'm!"

"We'll leave it till we get home," suggested Sir John. "I've a little more influence than I had a year ago, and I dare say we shall be able to get the boy something to suit him. Depend upon it I'll do my best; I don't forget that but for him I might be a bleached skeleton to-day."

"And that boy Booty--what about him, now?" asked Mr. Barkworth. "He's a fine fellow, you know. Too bad to leave him among these heathens to bow down to wood and stone, h'm! What can we do for him?"

"Put him in the K.A.R.," suggested Major Lister.

"I don't think he'd get on with them," said Sir John. "These Bahima are uncommonly proud."

"Have the boy in and let him speak for himself," said the doctor. "We cannot dispose of a human creature as if he were a bag of bones."

"Very well; ring for him."

In a minute or two Mbutu came in, dressed in loose garments of spotless linen. He looked rather shyly at the group of gentlemen, and yet stood proudly, and with an air of dignity.

"Mbutu," said Sir John, "we are all going back to England on Thursday, and your master will be with us. We should like to do something for you. You have been a faithful servant. Your master tells me that you have been his right hand--tending him in sickness, and never tired of helping him in health. You more than once saved his life. What would you like us to do for you?"

Mbutu was silent for some moments. Then he said, stumblingly:

"Sah my fader and mudder. No want leabe sah. No leabe him nebber, not till long night come. Big water? No like big water. Sah him village ober big water? Mbutu go; all same for one."

"I'm sure my nephew will be sorry to part with you," said Sir John kindly, "but I am afraid you cannot go with him. You see, he will not want your help in his own land. There are no forests to go through; no black men to need interpreters. I am afraid our cold bleak winters would not suit you, my boy."

"Tell you what," put in Mr. Barkworth, "let him try. Booty, you can come with me, and you'll often see your young master, let's hope. I'll take you as odd man, you know; clean the boots, run errands, rub down the pony, all that sort of thing, you know. Good suit of clothes; buttons, if you like, for best; a kind mistress and a comfortable home."

Mbutu drew himself up.

"Me Muhima," he said, addressing Sir John. "Muhima no slave. Clean boots for sah? Oh yes! sah fader and mudder. No for nudder master. Oh no! not for red-faced pussin."

"There's no gratitude--" Mr. Barkworth was beginning from sheer force of habit; but the boy went on:

"Found brudder, sah; brudder chief. Mbutu not go ober big water; berrah well. Go to brudder; be him katikiro, sah. Fink of master always, eber and eber, sah."

"I think you are wise," said Sir John. "You can talk it over with your master to-morrow."

"And just remember," put in the doctor, "that I will be in Kisumu for two years or more, and if ever you want any help, ask for Dr. O'Brien."

Tom had a long talk with Mbutu next day, and loth though he was to part with him, could not but approve his plan of returning to his brother's village. He took care that he should not go empty-handed; indeed, in point of worldly wealth the new katikiro was probably a greater man than his brother the chief. But it was only after much persuasion that he could be induced to accept anything whatever. As the doctor had decided to return to Kisumu at once, now that Tom's convalescence was assured, Mbutu agreed to go back with him without waiting to see his master off. The boy burst into tears for the first time in Tom's experience when the moment of parting came.

"Good-bye!" said Tom, putting his hand on the boy's head as he knelt by the couch. "You have been loyal and true to me, and I know that you will be a true katikiro to your brother. I should like to hear about you whenever you can get to Kisumu to send me a message. And see, I'll give you my watch. You don't need it to tell the time; but it will remind you of this wonderful year we have spent together. Perhaps I shall see you again some day. Good-bye, good-bye!"

Two days later Tom was carried on board the homeward-bound steamer amid the sympathetic cheers of a great crowd of Europeans and natives. Little had been seen of him, but from the government officials to the meanest coolie everybody knew all about him, and was ready to laud him to the skies.

As the gangway was about to be removed, a round little figure was seen rushing wildly up the quay, holding a blue envelope in his right hand, and shouting to the seamen.

"Just vun leetle moment!" cried Monsieur Armand Desjardins, panting as he tumbled on board. He made his way to the long chair on which Tom was lying, and handed him the envelope. "Monsieur Burnaby, vun leetle gift, vun souvenir, for to make you understan' my vair high consideration and my immense entusiasm. Adieu, my dear Monsieur Burnaby; dat you may arrive sound and safe at de end of de road, and vun fine day return for to see us now so desolate, dat is de prayer of your vair devoted Armand Desjardins. Adieu, mademoiselle, j'ai bien l'honneur de vous saluer; messieurs ... mademoiselle...."

And with his hand on his heart the vivacious little Frenchman made his best bow, and backed down the gangway.

The bell sounded, the screw revolved, and in a few minutes the vessel was steaming out of the harbour. Tom's friends stood at the rail, gazing at the receding shore and the waving hats and handkerchiefs until they had well-nigh faded from sight. Then they placed their deck-chairs in a semicircle around Tom, and sighed a sigh of great contentment.

"Well, we're off at last," said Mr. Barkworth, lighting a cigar and looking round over his spectacles on the group, with even more than his usual benevolence. "England, home, and beauty, and all that sort of thing, you know. No place like home. Well, what did mossoo give you, Tom? What I never can make out is, why a Frenchman can't do things in the same way as rational people. Why make a ballroom bow on the deck of a steamer, eh? Tell me that, now. What are you smiling at, Tom? Some bit of buffoonery, I'll warrant, h'm!"

"Monsieur Desjardins has dropped into verse," replied Tom, laughing outright. "A rhymed valedictory."

"Read it," said Sir John.

"Your accent is better than mine," said Tom, passing the paper to Lilian, his eyes twinkling. In her perfect accent, and with due attention to the mute e's, she began to read:

"Ô mon héros si jeune! ô guerrier intrépide!
L'Afrique à ton départ a le coeur triste et vide.
Lea bords du vaste lac résonnent de sanglots,
Et ton nom, ô Thomas, se mêle au bruit des flots."

Only Sir John and his nephew noticed that at this point the reader flushed a little, and crumpled the paper slightly in her hand. There was a momentary pause, as though everybody expected more to come, but Lilian was silent, and her father exclaimed:

"H'm! Translate, Lilian; why couldn't the mossoo say what he had to say in English?"

Sir John took the verses from her, and after an amused glance at them put them in his pocket.

"They're decent enough Alexandrines, Barkworth," he said with a chuckle. "Lilian's thinking of Tom's blushes, I suspect."

"Well then, translate, somebody. What's the fellow say?"

"Translate 'em in rhyme, a line each, sort of game," suggested Major Lister.

"A good idea!" exclaimed Sir John. "Place aux dames; you begin, Lilian; and it must be heroic measure, of course, to match the theme."

"How will this do?" asked Lilian after a moment or two.

"'O youthful hero, warrior brave and bold!'"

"Capital! and the right heroic strain. I go on:

'Deserted Afric's heart is sad and cold'.

Now, Lister, it's your turn."

Major Lister puffed solemnly at his pipe for at least a minute before he said slowly, pausing after every word:

"'The shores of the vast lake resound with sobs'."

"As literal as a Kelly's crib, 'pon my word!" cried Sir John, laughing; "but I can't say much for your sense of rhythm. Now Barkworth, you're in for the last line. Come along, no shirking:

'Et ton nom, ô Thomas, se mêle au bruit des fiots'."

"What's it mean in plain English? I never made poetry in my life; used to get swished horribly for my verses at school; never could see any good in 'em."

"Gammon! It means: 'And your name, O Thomas, mingles with the noise of

the waves'."

"There now, didn't I tell you so! Gammon indeed! Utter tomfoolery! How can his name do any such thing! Pure bosh; I knew it!"

"Play the game and don't argue. You've only to cap Lister's brilliant line, 'The-shores-of-the-vast-lake-re-sound-with-sobs--' syllable by syllable. Come along."

"I can't rhyme with 'sobs'. The only rhyme I know is 'lobs'; used to bowl 'em at Winchester forty odd years ago; 'sobs', 'lobs'--can't bring it in anyhow.

'The shores of the vast lake resound with sobs--'"

He pursed his lips and rubbed his chin.

"'The wapping waves exclaim, where's Thing-um-bobs?'"

put in Tom quietly, and Mr. Barkworth's protest that he didn't call that translating was drowned in laughter.

It was some weeks later. The scene was the breakfast-room at The Orchard, Winterslow. Lilian was already at the head of the table by the steaming urn, Tom was cutting a rose in the garden, and Sir John standing with his hands in his pockets at the open French window. He had come down overnight to spend a week with his old friend, whose guest Tom had been ever since his arrival in England.

"Kept you waiting, eh?" said Mr. Barkworth, coming in briskly, his rubicund face aglow. "Glorious morning. Letters not arrived yet? Ah! here they are. One for Tom; foreign post-mark. Hi!" he shouted. "Come along; letter for you. Bacon's getting cold."

Tom entered, cut the big square envelope, read the contents, and passed it to his uncle.

"That's the third," he said with a smile. He was quite the old Tom once more, bright-eyed, fresh-coloured, supple as ever; a little older in looks, to be sure, with an air of manliness and grit that rejoiced Sir John's heart.

"Another offer? Come, that's capital. Who is it this time, Burnaby?"

"The King of the Belgians, by George! His secretary offers Tom a commission in the Free State forces, with a very prettily-turned compliment."

"How proud you'll be, Mr. Burnaby!" said Lilian.

"Proud! Not he!" retorted her father. "He won't accept that, or I'm a Dutchman."

"It's a little embarrassing, though," said Tom. "People are very kind. A crib in

Nigeria a week ago, then one in Rhodesia, and now one in the Congo Free State!"

"Don't be in a hurry, Tom," said his uncle. "I had a long talk with Underwood of the Foreign Office yesterday. There's some idea of--but I won't give it away. Only I'll say this: that I don't think it'll be either Rhodesia or Nigeria, much less the Congo."

"I'm in no hurry, Uncle; it's very comfortable here, and a few months' rest will do me all the good in the world."

"Really!" returned Sir John, with a significant glance at Lilian. "By the way, I suppose you haven't seen Desjardins' latest article in the Paris *Figaro*? I have it in my pocket. He's running you for all you're worth--and more--as a world-hero, Tom. Here it is."

He handed a newspaper cutting to Tom. As he replaced a pile of papers in his pocket, a folded sheet fell to the floor. He picked it up, casually opened it, scanned it, and smiled.

"Now I think of it, Barkworth," he said, "we never showed you on the boat the second stanza of the little Frenchman's effusion, did we?"

"Oh, you really mustn't!" cried Lilian, starting up and flushing.

"What! what!" said her father. "Another verse of that rubbish! Let me see it."

Sir John handed him the paper; he put on his spectacles, and Lilian, throwing a reproachful look at Sir John, fled to the garden, while Tom tilted back his chair and laughed a little awkwardly. Mr. Barkworth pursed up his mouth and frowned.

"Why, hang it!" he cried, "here's my daughter's name! What does the wretched little man mean by writing my daughter's name! What's the meaning of it, Burnaby? I can't read the stuff."

"I'll read it to you:

'Tu vas, comblê de gloire, illustrer ta patrie:
Tu vas briser des coeurs, et provoquer l'envie.
Quel ange te conduit par delà l'ocean?--
La mer répond tout bas, murmurant "Lilian"'.

Perhaps Tom will oblige by translating."

"Not I, sir; I think you'll do it best. If you'll excuse me, I'll go and----"

"Yes, go and find her, certainly, my boy."

"Well now, Burnaby, just translate, please. There appears to be some mystery here, and I mean to get to the bottom of it, h'm!"

"You must make allowances for a Frenchman's sentiment, you know, Barkworth. What he says is something to this effect: 'Covered with glory, you're going to shed lustre on your country, and there you'll break all the girls' hearts

and make all the boys jealous. What angel is wafting you over the ocean?'--A little high-falutin, you see. It ends--'And the sea whispers the name----'"

"Confound his impudence!" broke in Mr. Barkworth. "What right----what are you laughing at, Burnaby? Why--God bless me, you don't mean there's anything in it? Eh? What? 'Gad, I'm delighted, delighted, immensely pleased, old man!--Look at them in the garden, Jack; aren't they a fine couple, now!"

"They're rather young yet, Barkworth, eh?"

"Young! Of course they're young. Makes me young again myself to see them there, God bless them! Call 'em in; I must shake hands with Tom, the young dog; I know him!"

"I'd let 'em alone if I were you, Barkworth. Come round to the stables, and I'll tell you what Underwood said to me."

It is early morning in Zanzibar. The Arab quarter is scarcely astir; there are few passengers in its narrow tortuous lanes, with their square houses, each standing aloof, dark, repellent, prison-like for all its whitewash. But in the market-place the slant rays of the sun light up a busy scene. In and out among the booths of the merchants and the unsheltered heaps in which the lesser traders expose their wares, moves a jostling crowd--negroes of Zanzibar; visitors from the coast tribes; Somalis from the north; Banyamwesi, even Baganda and Banyoro, from the far interior--chattering, chaffering, haggling in a hundred variants of the Swahili tongue. Now and again the half-naked crowd parts to make way for a grave stately Arab in spotless white, with voluminous turban, or for some Muscat donkey whose well-laden panniers usurp the narrow space.

Suddenly above the hum of the market rises a strident voice. The wayfarers turn, and see a gaunt, bent, hollow-eyed figure in mendicant rags; standing on a carpet at the entrance of an alley, he has begun to harangue with the fervour of madness all who choose to hear.

"*Hearken, ye faithful, sons of the Prophet, hearken while I tell of the shame that has befallen Islam! Verily, the day of our calamity has come upon us! Woe unto us! woe unto us! The hand of our foes is heavy upon us; they lie in wait for us, even as a lion for harts in the desert. Wallahi! the land was ours, from the sun's rising unto its setting, from the marge of the sea unto the uttermost verge of the Forest. Where now are all they that went forth, and in the name of Allah got them riches and slaves? Where are the leaders of old--Hamed ben Juna the mighty, Sefu his son strong in battle, yea, and the great Rumaliza? All, all are gone! I alone am left, even I, the least of their servants. The Ferangi--defiled be their graves!--shall they afflict us for ever? Are we dogs, that here, even here in our birthplace, the land of our fathers, we slink from the foot of the*

infidel? Awake, awake, O ye slothful! Haste ye! haste ye! Smite the Ferangi and spare not! Grind them into the dust; yea, crush them, destroy them utterly. Do ye linger or doubt? Behold, I will lead you! Lo, my sword!--is it not red with infidel blood? Let us sweep like the whirlwind upon them; like the lightnings of Allah will we rend and consume them. They that pollute our land shall be stricken, and none shall be left, no, not one alive for the wailing. By the beard of the Prophet I swear it!"

"Essalam alekam!" says a Somali in respectful greeting to a venerable seller of sweetmeats. "Who is he, O Giver of Delight?"

"Knowest thou not, O Lion of the Desert? He is a mad nebi from the Great Forest afar."

"Mashallah! And his name, O Kneader of Joy?"

"Men call him Mustapha."

* * * * * * * *

HERBERT STRANG

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